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MARION

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Florence Taylor Haselden

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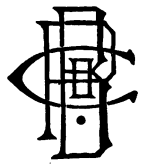

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MARION.

The Oaks, Mr. Vernon's beautiful country home, was famed for its magnificent oak trees. It was quite common for visitors to come from a great distance for the sole purpose of seeing them. They formed a pretty avenue from the house to the public road, and threw their abundant shade in all directions. The Oaks was one of these old time rambling houses, large and airy, and supplied with every convenience. There were several broad piazzas, covered with graceful, drooping vines, large, comfortable chairs scattered here and there, and flowers galore. And yet with this beautiful home and all its surroundings, the owner was a lonely and unhappy old man. Mr. Vernon had been prosperous from his first start in life, and now at the age of sixty-five he was very wealthy. He had not been like some men, miserly, but instead, had always been willing and glad to help any one in need. No one had ever begged alms of him and gone away disappointed. At the time of this story, he was the sole occupant of the Oaks with the exception of a few faithful old servants. He had lost his last loved one, his daughter, Sybil, eleven years ago. Her health had failed shortly after her marriage and she had gone abroad with her husband, John Heath, hoping

that the change would benefit her. They had been away four years when her husband died, and Sybil decided to go back to her father. After writing and telling him when to expect her and her baby girl, three years old, she started on her homeward journey. But she never reached home. A week or so later Mr. Vernon received a notice of her and her child's death, saying they had been buried at sea. They had died while on their way across the Atlantic.

Just about a mile below the Oaks, facing the big road, is situated a picturesque little cottage. This is the home of Mrs. Janet Clyde, Mr. Vernon's nearest neighbor. This household consists of Mrs. Clyde, her son, Philip, and a little girl, Marion, whom Mrs. Clyde claims as her neice. Mrs. Clyde has very little affection in her nature: love and the little attentions that most women value so highly, are not essential to her happiness. Her son has her whole love, that is, all the love that a nature like hers is capable of giving. Philip is a lad of sixteen. High spirited, but tender and loving as any girl. He seems to delight in teasing; especially Marion. She is fourteen years old; a child in years, but a little woman in many respects. A woman's loving heart beats in her little body.

It is the first day of June. Mrs. Clyde is busy with her dusting brush, moving about from chair to chair to make sure that every little particle of dust is removed. Marion is leaning over a table in the kitchen, wiping the last of the breakfast dishes before putting them away. Her face is flushed from the heat, her long brown curls are

tucked up to keep her neck cool, her sleeves are rolled up above the elbows, showing a pretty, plump pair of arms. She has a long apron on that completely covers her dress. There is a tired expression on her sweet face, a longing in the depths of the violet eyes—a longing for something better than to be a drudge, a longing for something better and brighter in life. Sad thoughts are flitting through her little head, when suddenly she hears a sharp voice calling her name, "Marion, Marion, what in the world is the matter with you? I called you twice. Come here this minute."

"Yes, aunty," answered Marion, "I am coming now. I was just trying to finish wiping these dishes. But I am through now." Then putting her hand to her head, she said, "I feel so tired this morning, Aunt Janet. What is it you want me to do now?"

"Tired!" exclaimed Mrs. Clyde in a sneering voice; "you are always tired when there is any work to be done. You are a good-for-nothing, lazy girl! No, I know what's the matter with you. You want to sit and dream all day, for that is all you are fit for, or else to spend all your time poring over those silly books that Philip brings home; filling that head of yours with all kinds of nonsense. Go get that pan of apples off the pantry shelf and pare them, and I want no idling, mind you."

Without a word Marion walked away and did her aunt's bidding. She carried the apples out to the back steps and sat down, and went to work diligently. Her thoughts kept time with

her fingers. She was a great thinker, this little girl, and she received many a scolding for what her aunt called dreaming.

"I am lazy, good for nothing and idle, so Aunt Janet says," murmurs Marion to herself. "I am neither lazy nor idle, but I am tired, tired of this kind of life and everything in it. And how often she tells me I am ungrateful! Well, perhaps I am; but I cannot see that I have anything to be grateful to her for. She gives me nothing, not even a kind word now and then; and goodness knows I work hard enough to pay for the little I eat and wear; I never have pretty clothes like the other children I see. Sometimes I feel like I would like to run away. I wouldn't care where I went, so long as I was away from aunty's harsh voice."

Just at this moment a fine looking boy bounces up the steps and takes a seat by Marion, thus putting an end to her thoughts. The first thing he does is to snatch the hair-pins that Marion had tucked her curls up with, causing her hair to fall about her shoulders.

"Don't twist your hair up like that again, lady bird," exclaimed Philip, for it is he that has interrupted Marion's thoughts. He has always been fond of the girl, and at times has felt a great pity for her, but each time that he questioned his mother about Marion's parents, he had received short answers, and was told never to mention the subject again.

"Well, ladybird," giving her curls a pull, "what are you pouting about this morning?"

Marion keeps her eyes on her apples and

works on as though she isn't aware of his presence.

"O, you have lost your tongue, have you? Well, I want some of those apples," and with that he picks out two of the prettiest red ones he can find, and commences to eat them. Marion is on her feet in a minute.

"You hateful thing! You just put those apples back. You know Aunt Janet will blame me. Go away and leave me. I don't like you!" said Marion in quite a temper.

"There, there, don't get in a tantrum. I just wanted to make sure that you had a tongue. You shall have your apples back."

Philip put the apples back in the pan, but before doing so took a big bite out of one.

"My, but you don't look pretty when you are mad. You mustn't spoil your good looks by getting so vexed. You are to be my wife some day, you know, and I want you to keep as pretty as you are now." He watches her face in amusement, for he takes a keen delight in teasing her.

"I shall never marry you, Philip Clyde, for you are too hateful. As soon as I am grown I am going to leave here, and work for my own living, and I shall go where you will never find me."

"You can't ever hide from me. I am going to be a detective, and I shall find you wherever you are."

For answer, Marion puts out her under lip in a scornful way, but otherwise ignores his last assertion.

"Did you hear what I said, Miss Stubbornness? But you are not going away, at any time." Then, moving up close to her, "I was just teasing you, girlie; don't you know I couldn't get along without you?"

"Go along, and hush your fibbing. If I cared for anyone I wouldn't show it by always teasing them and pulling their hair. It's a wonder my curls are not all pulled out, for every time you come near me you give them a jerk. I wish your hair was long enough to pull, and I would pay you back sometimes. O, I just hate boys, anyhow," she exclaimed, getting up and shaking the apple pealing from her lap all over Philip's head and shoulders. "Take that!" she said, then ran in the kitchen and left him trying to get the fine pieces of pealing out of his hair.

"Philip, have you seen Mr. Vernon to-day?" said Mrs. Clyde, as he came into the dining room, where she was doing some work.

"Yes, mama, I met him on the road to-day, and he says he has made arrangements for me to go to school in two months' time. He begs me to bring Marion over to see him, so he can have her company sometimes while I am away. He seems very anxious to see her."

Mrs. Clyde is pale and silent. Philip continues:

"I think he has gotten just glimpses of her as he passed her on the road. You know, mother, Marion is beautiful, and I believe he would love her, too, if he could see her; only she is so queer sometimes."

Mrs. Clyde slips into the nearest chair, and

puts her hands over her eyes for a minute. Philip notices his mother's agitation, but says nothing. She soon regains her composure, and her answer is just what her son was expecting it would be.

"No, Marion cannot go to the Oaks. If she ever went once she would never be satisfied here again. Her place is at home, and besides she is all the help I have, and I cannot spare her."

"Mama, you don't treat her just right. She is nothing but a child, and she never has any pleasure of any sort, unless it is her books. She seems to enjoy studying along with me so, and she learns lots faster than I do. She never looks quite happy to me. Why, she would nearly have a fit if she could get in the library at the Oaks, among all those lovely books," says Philip earnestly.

"You are right, but I shall take good care that she doesn't. Why, her head is brim full of nonsense now from reading all that truck you bring her."

"Why, mama, the books I bring her are all good. I take care to bring only what I think will help her. I wish you would let her visit at the Oaks. Mr. Vernon has been so kind to me, and now he even insists on sending me to a good boarding school, I don't see how you can refuse him a little thing like that. He is so lonely, and he loves company, especially young people."

"Look here, Philip, don't you go and fill Marion's head with all kinds of foolishness. She is not going to the Oaks, so you need not mention it to her."

"No, I shan't mention it, as you are so determined that she shan't go. But I tell you what I would do, mama, if I were in Marion's place. I would run away, and never come back here again."

He leaves the room, for he knows that his last remark has stirred his mother's anger. He makes his way to the library, to finish a book he is reading.

"Poor little girl," he says, as he searches for the book that he wants; "she looks so miserable sometimes. Never mind, as soon as I am through with school, and able to work for myself, I shall take her away and make her happy."

There is to be a picnic among the children in the neighborhood. Marion has been asked to join the party. O, how she would love to go, she thinks. What a delight it would be to go with the children, to romp and play for one whole day. But there is Aunt Janet. What will she say? Marion's lips tremble, and tears fill her eyes as she thinks of her aunt refusing to let her go. And then all the other children will have pretty new dresses; if she goes, she will have to wear one of her old ones; for of course she couldn't think of getting a new one. It has been quite a long time since she has had a new dress, but she will be willing to wear an old one, if Aunt Janet will only let her go. She wonders whether Philip is going, but of course he is. Doesn't his mother let him do anything and go anywhere? Has she ever refused him anything? The next day Marion goes up and stands by the machine where Mrs. Clyde is do-

ing some sewing; she looks on for some little time, and then musters up enough courage to say,

"Aunt Janet, the children are going to have a picnic next Saturday, and they want me to go with them. May I?"

Mrs. Clyde looked up at her as though she had asked some most unheard of thing.

"Please, aunty, let me go. I never have been to a picnic, and I want to go so much," pleadingly.

"Who invited you to this picnic?"

"Bessie Staunton."

"Where is it to be?"

"About a mile below here, in the woods."

"No, you cannot go; the idea of you asking such a question. Besides, you know I am rushed to death on Saturdays. Bessie Staunton's mother had better keep her at home, and teach her something, instead of letting her run wild. I doubt if she knows how to use a broom."

Marion swallowed with difficulty, for there was a gerat lump in her throat, and it seemed to be swelling. She would rather die than let her aunt see her disappointment, so she stifles back the tears that are forcing their way, and makes a last appeal.

"Aunt Janet, if you will let me go this time, I will work so hard afterwards. Just this one time, and I will never ask to go again. Please, aunty."

"I have said all I intend saying on the subject, so let it rest."

Marion bites her lip fiercely. For a minute

she feels rebellious. Then she quietly leaves the room, and goes upstairs to her own room, and throws herself on her bed, and sobs as though her heart will break. Finally the sobbing ceases, and she slips from the bed and falls upon her knees, and with a sorrowful little heart prays:

"Dear God, I had such a wicked feeling just now when aunty refused to let me go to the picnic; but I am sorry, so please forgive me. I am a lonely little girl, for I have no mama, and nobody loves me. I seem to be in everybody's way. Other little girls are happy, but I never have any fun. Please, God, soften aunty's heart, so she will let me go to the picnic. Please make me a good girl, and don't let me feel wicked any more. For Christ's sake, amen."

She rises to her feet, washes her face, and goes back downstairs. She meets Philip on the steps. She tries to slip by him, for she does not want him to see that she has been crying. But he catches hold of her apron just as she tries to pass him, and stops her.

"Not so fast, lady bird! O say, there's to be a jolly picnic on next Saturday. You will go, won't you?" he says, all in one breath.

"No, I am not going," trying in vain to free herself.

"Why not?" asked Philip.

"Aunt Janet says I cannot go, that I must stay at home and work," dolefully.

"Work, fiddlesticks! Mama surely can't mean to keep you at home."

"Yes, she does, for she told me so not twenty minutes ago."

"Well, if she does it will be a blooming shame! Marion, why don't you show some pluck? Just tell mother you mean to go," then as if on second thought, "but of course you wouldn't do that. But my, you have more patience than I would have. Why, if mama were to tell me I couldn't go, I—I would just run away and go anyhow. Never mind, perhaps she will change her mind between now and Saturday," though in his heart he doubted it himself.

"Come on with me, for I have something to show you," leading the way down stairs. "It's a brand new book, and we can read it together."

Saturday has dawned. Philip had begged and coaxed his mother to let Marion go with him to the picnic, but to no avail; so he went alone. She watched him from her room window as he left the house. There were tears in her eyes, and a pain in her little heart. But she went about the house and did her work as usual, but was very silent. Mrs. Clyde turned and looked at her several times in curiosity when she knew that Marion wasn't looking her way. She expected to see the girl in tears all day. She had such little patience herself that she couldn't understand it in others. Marion had often puzzled her aunt. She had been accustomed all her life to fly into a temper when things did not work just as she wished, and she was often surprised at Marion's meekness and willingness to give up to others.

That afternoon Marion was sent on an errand to a neighbor's, some little distance away. She was walking along slowly, thinking of the

children at the picnic and what fun they were having, when she was overtaken by Mr. Vernon, driving a pretty grey mare. He drew rein and stopped beside her, saying,

"Come, jump in, little one, and I will give you a ride."

He holds out his hand to help her in. She takes it shyly, and he helps her to the seat by his side. They drive off together down the cool, shady road.

"You are Philip's little cousin, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir," answers Marion, nervously, for she is in awe of the great gentleman.

As Mr. Vernon looks into her eyes he sees, as it were, the very likeness of his lost daughter. The same golden brown curls, the same violet eyes. A great longing to take this little girl in his arms comes over him, but instead, he asks her,

"What is your name, my child?"

"Marion, sir."

"O yes, I remember now; that's the name Philip always calls you by. I had forgotten it. Marion what?"

"Sir," said Marion, looking at him with a puzzled expression on her face.

"I mean what is your last name, my dear?"

"I don't know, sir. Aunt Janet has never told me. I have always been called Marion."

Mr. Vernon sees at once that there is some mystery about this sweet, innocent child, and from that moment has sworn to himself that he will befriend her at any cost to himself. He changes the subject.

"How is it you are not at the picnic to-day, little one? I understood all the children in the neighborhood were to be there?"

"Yes, sir, I was asked to go; but aunty couldn't spare me."

"Couldn't spare you; why, my child?"

"There was so much work to be done, sir."

"Work, what kind of work?"

"All kind of work, sir. I help aunty cook, clean house, and run errands, and anything else that she wants me to do."

Mr. Vernon looked troubled at her reply.

"And was it this work that kept you from the picnic?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"And how old are you, Marion?"

"I am just fourteen, sir," was her reply.

"And did you want to go this picnic?"

"O yes, I begged aunty so hard, and because she wouldn't let me go, I just laid awake one whole night and cried, but I couldn't help it, sir."

"Why, of course, you couldn't, little one, and it seems strange that Mrs. Clyde kept you from going. You are only a child, and should not be worked too hard."

Then looking at her tenderly, he said to her:

"I wish I had a little girl like you at my home. How would you like to come and live with me?"

"O, sir, that would be just grand!" exclaimed Marion joyfully.

"Would it?" smiling at her way of expressing herself. "Yes, I think it would be for both of us."

They have come alongside a neat little cottage, and Marion turns to her companion, "I shall have to get out here, sir; this is the house."

"Very well," said he, riding up close to the little gate; "we shall take another ride some day."

"O, yes, sir; thank you very much. Good-by, sir."

"Good-by, little Marion."

Marion doesn't intend telling any one of her delightful ride. She knows very well that if Mrs. Clyde finds it out, she will receive a good scolding; so she decides to keep it to herself. What a dear old man Mr. Vernon is. She cannot wonder at Philip loving him, for how could anyone help it. And he had spoken about letting her live with him. But of course Aunt Janet would never hear to such a thing. O, wouldn't it be grand to live in a lovely home like the Oaks, and never have any hard work to do. She lay awake at nights thinking of Mr. Vernon and his beautiful home, and what she would do, and wear, if she went to live with him. But she was very careful to keep these thoughts to herself. She would have liked to tell Philip about her wonderful ride, for she knew he loved Mr. Vernon, but he might tell Aunt Janet, and then her dream would be at an end.

The time had come for Philip to leave home for school. Mr. Vernon had taken a great liking for the boy, and had insisted on sending him away to some good college.

Marion had often told him when vexed by his constant teasing that she would be glad to

see him leave. But now that the time had come, and she realized that he was going, she felt a strange little tugging at her heart; and wondered what would become of her when he had gone. One thing of which she was sure, and that was, it mattered not how much she missed him, he would never know it, at least, not if she could help it. Poor little girl! She never could believe that Philip really could feel anything but pity for her. Wasn't she a burden on his mother, and didn't that mother treat her as though she was something that had to be tolerated? True, Mrs. Clyde claimed her as a niece; but she was treated no better than any servant. If the mother hated her, surely the son couldn't have any liking for her. It was thus Marion reasoned; but she was only a child, and had many things to learn yet, both pleasant and unpleasant.

It was very hard for Mrs. Clyde to part with her boy. She hugged him to her heart, kissed him many times, and tried hard to keep the tears back. She knew it would grieve him to see her weep.

"Good-by, mama," he said; "don't fret about me. I shall be a good boy, and when I come back again I will be a man! I know four years seem a long time; but it will soon pass, and then I won't leave you any more. Mama," taking her hand, "if you love me, and want to please me, treat Marion kind, and don't be so cross with her while I am away. Kiss me once more. Good-by, mama, dear. I am going to tell Marion good-by now, if I can find her."

She had hidden herself in the library, for she

could not keep the tears back; they just would steal down her cheeks in spite of all she could do. Philip found her there. Without a word he stole up behind her, put his hands over her eyes, pulled her head back, and kissed her over and over again.

"Why, dearie, what are you crying for? Wipe the tears away, and tell me good-by. Put your arms around my neck and kiss me of your own free will. I have always had to steal all my kisses before; but I am going away for four long years, and you might do that much to please me."

The tears are falling so fast now that Marion cannot speak.

"Marion, are you crying because I am leaving you? You always said you would be glad when I had gone, but I didn't think you meant it."

Marion's pride came to her rescue. She just would not let him know that she was weeping on his account. She brushed the tears away and looked up at him.

"No, I am not crying on your account. Can't I weep when I want to without telling you the reason? Good-by," holding out her hand to him. He caught her hand, drew her into his arms and kissed her fiercely, then left her, and she knew he was gone.

Many a time afterwards Philip thought of Marion's actions and was puzzled. She always spoke to him harshly, and yet he felt sure that she was crying that day because he was leaving, and she didn't resist him when he took her into his arms and kissed her. Perhaps he would un-

derstand her some day, for he certainly did not then.

It is two years since Philip went away. It is a dark, stormy night; the rain drops beat against the window panes, the lightning flashes, and the wind howls mournfully; but it doesn't seem to affect the inmates of the little cottage.

Marion and Mrs. Clyde are sitting in the library. Neither has spoken for some time. Mrs. Clyde's thoughts are with her boy, but Marion's run riot. She is sixteen years old now, and has made up her mind not to put up with her old life any longer. She is very sensitive and proud. A good home has been offered her, a home where she will be loved; and her mind is made up. She breaks the silence.

"Aunt Janet, I am no longer a child, and therefore do not want to be treated as one. Please tell me who I am, and whether I am really your niece or not. I don't believe I am; else you would have been kinder to me, and not treated me as something beneath you. Will you answer my questions?"

"No, I will not. You are the most ungrateful girl I ever saw in my life," was Mrs. Clyde's answer.

"Very well, aunt, I have tried to be patient; but as you refuse to answer my questions, so I refuse to live in the house with you any longer. You cannot compel me to, for I am old enough to choose for myself. Mr. Vernon has offered me a home, not as a servant, but as a daughter, where I shall be loved and treated as though I had some feeling. I know it will displease you,

but I shall go, nevertheless. You have no legal claim on me, and Heaven knows I have worked hard enough for my board and clothes. If you had treated me differently, or given me a kind word now and then, instead of always finding fault with everything I did, I never would have left you. But if I were to stay here until I was an old woman, I would always be a drudge."

Mrs. Clyde was astounded. She had never even dreamed of anything like this happening. And could that girl that had just spoken to her in such a commanding way be the meek Marion she had always ruled with a look? It was almost impossible to believe it. And yet it was true. Mrs. Clyde gets in a rage, for she sees that this girl has the whip hand. For what can she do to prevent her doing as she says? Nothing, absolutely nothing, but she will never give in, at least. She looks at Marion with wrathful eyes.

"You shall never leave my house. This is your home, and here you shall stay; and I shall tell Mr. Vernon so, too. He thinks you are an angel; he doesn't know you like I do."

She gets up and leaves the room, slamming the door behind her, and goes upstairs.

Left alone, Marion threw herself on the sofa, and gave vent to her tears. How lonely her life had been for the last two years, since Philip had gone away. At times it was almost unendurable, and how she longed to have him back. She had always been so cross with him, yet she knew in her heart that she loved him. There was no doubt now. But what would his mother say if

she knew it, for she thought no one good enough for her boy. Well, she would never know it, no one would ever know it. She would never let the secret be wrung from her. As the clock struck eleven, Marion jumped to her feet. She little dreamed it was so late. She made the doors and windows secure for the night, then went to her room, to think, if not to sleep.

Marion had completely won Mr. Vernon's heart. He loved her, though he couldn't have told why. Since the day of the picnic, when she had taken her first ride with him, he had planned to get her away from the cottage, where he knew she was not appreciated. Not once had Marion ever complained to him, still he soon found out that her life was very hard, and that she was rarely, if ever, happy. He decided at once that he was going to have her. He didn't fear very much trouble from Mrs. Clyde, for he knew that she did more talking than anything else. Mr. Vernon often drove out the very times he knew Marion was likely to be out, in hopes of meeting her and enjoying a pleasant ride with her. They had become fast friends, and they often talked of Philip, for Mr. Vernon had wondered if it were possible that he, too, could have ever been unkind to Marion, and he tried to find out without asking the direct question. But she assured him in many ways that Philip was never unkind to her. She spoke of a little Bible he had given her on her eighth birthday, and told him how he had let her read all the nice books that he brought home, and how lonely she had been, and how she had missed him since he had

gone. It would have been hard for him to believe that Philip could have been unkind to any one, especially a sweet girl like Marion.

Early the next morning while the grass was still wet with dew Marion was on her way to the fields to gather black berries for her aunt's puddings. On her way back she met her friend, Mr. Vernon, and as he looked at her he thought to himself what a beautiful picture she would make taken just as she looked then. On one arm she carried a basket full of ripe blackberries, a wreath of wild flowers was wound around her large drooping hat; her curls were blowing about her shoulders, and her face was wreathed in smiles. She was prettier than any wild flower that grew in those fields, but she did not know it, for Philip was the only one that had ever called her pretty, and of course he meant it to tease her; so she had never thought much of it.

"Good morning, little girl," said Mr. Vernon as he came up to her.

"Good morning, sir," was Marion's reply.

"You are an early bird. What have you got in your basket, wild flowers?"

"Blackberries and wild flowers. I gather the berries for Aunt Janet and the flowers for myself. The fields were blue with the violets. I don't think I ever saw so many before. It was hard to keep from tramping on them. Don't you want some of them?" handing him a pretty little bunch of the violets. He took them and fastened them in his buttonhole, saying,

"I have always loved the little violets, for they were my daughter Sybil's favorite flowers. I

remember when she used to do just as you are doing: go to the fields, and come back decked in the wild flowers."

They had walked a little way when he turned to her suddenly,

"Child, you don't know how much you are like my Sybil. I cannot understand it; you talk and look as she did, and you have even her little ways. If her little child had lived she would have been just your age, and I imagine she would have looked like you. But both of them are gone, so I shall take you for my daughter, and love you just as much as you will let me."

"O, love me just as much as you can! I have often wished I had someone to care for me, a father or mother."

"I love you already, my child; and I am on my way to your home now, to see Mrs. Clyde. Unless she can prove that she has some legal claim on you, I shall inform her that I intend taking you home with me right away. And then I will see what can be done to make you as happy as you deserve to be."

"O, Mr. Vernon, you know that I want to go with you, and I will do everything I can to make you love me; but if you go to aunty about it, she will think I sent you, and she may be cross and say unkind things to you."

"Tut, tut, child, don't you worry—as soon as she once understands that I mean to have you, she will give in quick enough. That's the way with those kind of women. She has been having her way too much here of late, so I am going to have mine now."

As soon as Mrs. Clyde saw them come to the house together, she knew what Mr. Vernon had come for. She had a battle to fight, she knew, but what weapons had she to fight with? None —she knew she was helpless, that she dare not answer any questions that he might ask her. As soon as they reached the piazza, Marion called for her aunt. As Mrs. Clyde joined Mr. Vernon, Marion went at once to her room, and sat down to wait for results. Of course Mr. Vernon would win; but she feared her aunt, especially when she was aroused. She had no idea that Philip would blame her for leaving the cottage for the Oaks. Why, he spent as much time at the Oaks as he did at home; so why should he blame her.

Mr. Vernon broached the subject at once.

"Mrs. Clyde, I came over this morning to tell you that I intend adopting Marion for my own daughter. Of course, if you have any legal claim on her and can show the proofs, I shall have to ask your permission to adopt her; but if you have not, and if she is willing to come to me, that will be all that is necessary. And she is willing and anxious to come. Have you any legal claim on her?"

"None, except that I have been a mother to the girl, and have cared for her ever since she was a baby. That should give me some claim on her. It is hard for me to refuse you anything after all your kindness to Philip; but I am all alone; why should you want to take Marion away? Has she been complaining to you about me?"

"O, no, no! I am a lonely old man, and when

I take a fancy to any one, I want them with me if possible. I loved your boy when I first saw him, and I had him with me as much as I could; but of course I could not have taken him from you. Now, you do not need Marion, and I do. I will take her home with me, and send you a girl to help you in your work, and to stay at nights with you. You will not be by yourself, you see. Come, come; won't that do?"

"I don't see how I am to help myself. You say you intend taking her whether I am willing or not; so I suppose I will have to be satisfied. Marion has a most peculiar way of showing her gratitude for all I have done for her."

"O, no, Mrs. Clyde, don't blame her there. You would do the same thing if you were in her place. You don't understand her; she is a lovely character."

"Of course," sneeringly, "she is all that is sweet and lovely to you. It is to her advantage to be so. Take care she doesn't repay your kindness in the same way she has repaid mine."

"I have no fear. I see you misjudge her greatly; but perhaps you may understand her better some day."

"I don't care to understand her any better than I do now. I hope you won't be disappointed in her, though I am afraid you will."

"I am willing to run the chances. But I must be going, for I have some work that must be attended to right away. How was Philip getting on when you heard last?" reaching for his hat.

"Splendid, sir," rather stiffly.

"I am glad to hear that, though of course I

expected it. He is one of the bright fellows, and will make a name for himself yet. May I see Marion before I go?"

"I will call her," said Mrs. Clyde, going into the house. In a few minutes Marion joined Mr. Vernon. He told her that she was to come to him, that he would send for her the next morning. He gave her until then to get her belongings together. After he had gone she ran back to her room as light-hearted as any bird. She was free, and she felt like singing, free to dream all she wanted to, and to read to her heart's content. There was no more work for her. It didn't take her long to get her few things together. She put them all in her little trunk, and then went downstairs to help her aunt. She could work now with a light heart, for to-morrow she would be free. Philip had written her two letters, and she had prized them and put them away as sacred, but had never answered them. After going to her room that night she decided to write him and tell him about going to live at the Oaks. She wrote a few lines, then crumpled the sheets up and threw them in the fireplace, exclaiming,

"No, I'll not write, I'll let Aunt Janet tell him. Should I write, he would be sure to read between the lines, and discover my secret. He shall not know that I love him." And with that determination she lay down to rest.

The next morning Marion was up bright and early. She hadn't slept much, for she was too happy to sleep.

Mrs. Clyde hadn't spoken to her since the

interview with Mr. Vernon, but Marion knew it was her duty to say something before leaving the house. Of course her aunt was very bitter against her for defying her wishes, and sne expected nothing but a burst of anger from her. But she made up her mind to take patiently anything she might say to her, because she was Philip's mother, and he loved her.

She saw from the window a carriage coming down the road, and feeling sure it was from the Oaks, she went to the pantry where she knew she would find her aunt.

"Aunt Janet, I have come to say good-by. I know that you do not love me, but I wish that we could be friends."

Marion is silent a few minutes, hoping that Mrs. Clyde will make some reply, but she ignores her completely, so she continues.

"If you are willing, I will come over and see you sometimes, that is, of course, if you want me."

She could see that her aunt was making a great effort to control herself.

"No," she said, emphatically, "when you leave my house you leave it forever. You have taken matters into your own hands, so now you go your way, and I'll go mine."

"But, aunty, it would grieve Philip to know that we were not even on speaking terms; let me come to see you once a week, or at least once a month."

"Philip hasn't anything to do with this affair. Go along to the Oaks, and leave me alone! Go ride in your fine carriages, and dress in silks and

satins, and be a fine lady, as you have pictured yourself; and see how happy you will be. You are something to be the mistress of a home like the Oaks; your place is in the kitchen, not the drawing room. Mr. Vernon will rue this day yet."

"Not if I can help it, aunty. I would have loved you and acted the part of a daughter to you if you had only let me. But instead, you held me aloof, and never showed the least sign of affection for me; but showed plainly that you hated me. I have often wondered why it was that you disliked me so, I certainly have tried to do right, even if I failed sometimes."

"O, yes, I know, you are a very angel! I have looked sometimes, expecting to see the wings sprouting. I am glad this earth isn't blessed with many angels such as you," in a contemptuous tone.

Marion sees there's no use trying to argue with her aunt; so she decides to put an end to the interview.

"Very well, I am sorry you won't be friends, but if you should need me at any time, just let me know, and I will come to you. Good-by."

"It isn't very likely I shall ever send for you, my fine lady," says Mrs. Clyde to herself, after Marion had left her. Those words came back to her a few years later; and she remembered them too well.

Marion was duly installed at the Oaks as its mistress. It was hard for her to realize her good fortune. It seemed to her like some lovely fairy tale. Everything was beautiful, and her

own little room was all that love and wealth could make it. Mr. Vernon was kindness itself. He had welcomed her to his home in a way that she could not fail to appreciate. He took her in his arms lovingly and kissed her, saying,

"I want you to be just as happy as you can, dearie. You are my little daughter now, and everything I have will be yours when I am gone. In the front room you will find a piano that belonged to my Sybil. Make use of it if you can. It has been a long time since there was music in the house."

"I don't know how to play, sir."

"Well, you shall learn. I will get a good tutor for you, and you can spend a part of each day in study. Would you like that?"

"O yes, I love music dearly, and I will study so hard."

"Very well, but in the meantime, I shall send you into town to pick out a suitable wardrobe for a daughter of the house. You must have everything nice, and a plenty. Mrs. Carter, a motherly old lady, has promised to take charge of things. She is to be housekeeper, but will help you in anything you want done. She is very clever, so she will accompany you, and help you in your purchases."

Marion's heart was full. She was unused to such kindness, and did not know what to say to show her appreciation. She wound her arms around his neck, put her fresh red lips to his cheek and said,

"I wish I knew how to thank you. You are too kind to me. I can never repay you."

"I don't want to be paid except in one way: love me as much as you can, that is all I ask," then pinching her chin playfully, "I am not giving so much after all; there is much more selfishness on my part than you think. You may not find it very pleasant living with and humoring a fussy old man like me—eh, little girl?"

She laughs happily. "I shall enjoy it, I know, but what shall I call you?"

"Call me father, if you will. I should like that."

"Yes, I shall like it, too. I have never known a father, and would love to have someone I could call by that name."

Just then a bell clangs loudly through the halls.

"Come, let's go down, there's the bell calling us to dinner," taking her hand and leading the way.

Marion's life at the Oaks was one long dream of happiness. Mr. Vernon did as he had promised: procured a suitable tutor for Marion, and she progressed wonderfully. Mrs. Carter had been more than kind in many ways. She went with Marion to select a wardrobe; but Marion only stood and looked on while she did all the selecting. She looked in amazement at the number of beautiful things picked out for her, and wondered if she would know herself when arrayed in such finery. But in a very short time she was perfectly at home in her new surroundings, and wore the pretty dresses with the grace of a queen, and as though she had been used to them all her life.

A year has passed. There is to be a party at

the Oaks in honor of Marion's seventeenth birthday. Invitations have been sent out, and everyone is looking forward to the event with a great deal of pleasure. During the year that Marion has been at the Oaks she has made a very great number of friends, among both sexes; and Mr. Vernon looks on with pride when he sees how much she is admired by all, both old and young, rich and poor.

"Now look, Miss Marion," said Mrs. Carter, drawing her attention to the likeness in the mirror; "there won't be a sweeter flower in the room to-night than you."

She was helping Marion dress for the party, and she could not help admiring the beautiful girl, and what seemed strange to her was that she seemed to care so little about her beauty.

"I know it will do the old man's heart good to look at you: you are so much like Miss Sybil used to be; only she was very fragile, and you always have so many roses in your cheeks."

Mrs. Carter pulled her right in front of the mirror, saying,

"Now look, and tell me honestly what you think of the young lady you see there. Every young fellow that has a heart will want to be on his knees to you to-night."

Marion looks up, and she is pleased with the picture before her. She sees a beautiful girl in pale blue silk, trimmed in white foamy lace; her only ornaments are pearls. She turns to Mrs. Carter.

"The dress is very pretty, and I trust father will like me in it."

"Well! for the life of me, I cannot understand you! So the dress is very pretty, eh? How about the girl that wears it? My, my, when I was your age, if I had ever looked as beautiful as that, I would have stood before the mirror for hours admiring myself, and thinking how much prettier I was than the other young ladies. You have the least vanity of any one I ever saw. I am sorry for poor Guy Strong, after he sees you once."

"Who is Guy Strong, Mrs. Carter, and why should you be sorry for him especially?" asked Marion.

"He is the son of Mr. Vernon's dearest friend, and has just come home from a long trip abroad. He will be here to-night, and he is a man after my own heart. I feel sure he will lose his heart to you as soon as he sees you. I know him well, and he fancies just such girls as you. He has little patience with the girls that flirt, spend half their time at dances, and make light of a man's affections."

"Why, he must be a paragon, for you to sing his praises so. I am sure he must be worthy, though, for you ought to be a very good judge of character. I shall like to meet him."

"You will meet him to-night, for of course he will be here—but here I am chatting away, and Mr. Vernon may knock for you any minute. I have the bouquet to arrange yet, and then I am through with you."

Just then there was a light knock on the door, and Marion opened it, for she knew it was Mr. Vernon come for her. His face lit up with

pleasure when he looked at her. She noticed it, and was glad that he was pleased.

"Will I do, father?" said she demurely.

"Do? Why, child, you are lovely," then taking her hand, "but come, the guests are waiting, and besides I mustn't make my little girl vain by praising her too much; it is a wonder to me that your head hasn't been turned, as the old saying is, long before now; but you are not vain, and I am glad it is so."

All eyes were turned in their direction as they entered the bright room. He introduced her to those that were strangers to her, and led her to a seat near a clump of ferns. In the space of a few minutes she was the center of attraction. Half an hour later Mr. Vernon came up to her, followed by a strikingly handsome young man.

"Marion, let me introduce you to my young friend, Guy Strong. I hope you will be good friends."

She greeted him pleasantly, and he took a seat by her side, thinking to himself that here was his ideal of womanhood. He had met and known many girls, but none had ever impressed him as Marion had done. Everyone seemed to be enjoying the evening. Lovers strolled out on the lawn in the moonlight, others promenaded up and down the broad piazzas; and it was quite late when the last guest had gone, and Mr. Vernon and Marion were alone. He turned to her,

"Well, dearie, have you enjoyed yourself?"

"O, yes, so much! I never dreamed of ever being so happy," said she.

"I thought of Philip to-night, and wondered

what he would have thought if he could have gotten a peep at you, surrounded by so many beaux. I don't think he would have known his little cousin."

"No, I guess not," said Marion, "for I hardly know myself sometimes, but when will he be coming home, father? Isn't his time nearly up?"

"He has little more than a year longer yet. I received a letter from him to-day, and he is very glad to know that you are with me. I hope to see a great deal of him when he comes home. He is a noble boy, Marion, and he deserves a better mother than he has. I knew his father well, and a better man never lived."

It does her heart good to hear Mr. Vernon praise Philip, but she says nothing.

"Come, come, it is late; go to bed, my child. You must keep those roses in your cheeks, and late hours is a capital thing to drive them away."

She kissed him lightly, "Good night, father, dear; I will try to keep the roses for your sake."

It is two months later. Guy Strong has been a constant visitor at the Oaks since his first meeting with Marion. From the first he knew in his heart that Marion was the only woman in the world for him. If she would love him in return he could look for no greater happiness than to call her his wife—but if she denied him that love, he would live his life out alone, still loving her to the end. He had come from a proud race —a race noted for their loyalty to the women they loved. He wasn't the kind of man that loved a woman, and being denied her love, could console himself with some other woman's love. He

had promised himself that he would not speak of his love until he had received some little encouragement from her, some little sign to show that she was glad to have him with her. He had waited and watched, and now he was in despair. He had often come upon her suddenly, sitting in one of her many favorite nooks reading, but there was never any tell-tale flush, no drooping of the eyelids, nothing to show that she was glad to see him. True, she was always kind and courteous, but she was that way with everyone she knew. It was not her nature to be otherwise.

It was with a hopeless feeling in his heart that he went to see her one afternoon. Marion was reclining in a hammock in the summer house, very much interested in a book she was reading. Her white dress swept the floor as she swayed gently to and fro. She was so absorbed in her story that she did not notice a stalwart form come lightly up the steps. He stepped up to the hammock, just behind her head, laid hold of the rope gently, and his arms went back and forth with the motion of the hammock. He swung her thus for several minutes, watching her the while, his heart in his eyes as he looked at her. If he had followed his impulses, he would have gathered her, hammock and all, to his heart, and poured out his love to her, and begged some little in return; but he let his head rule him instead of his heart. After watching her for some time, she seemed to become suddenly aware of his presence. She jumped up quickly, exclaiming,

"O, dear! how you startled me! I thought I

was quite alone. I was so taken up with my book that I think I forgot everything else."

"I beg your pardon, Miss Marion; I know I should have made my presence known at once; but I could not resist the temptation. And then you were so absorbed in your story that I hated to disturb you. May I sit down and chat a little, or do you wish to finish your story?"

"O, no, sit down. I think I am tired reading, for a while at least. I have passed the most interesting part of the story, and a few more pages will finish it."

"What do you consider the most interesting part of a story, Miss Marion?" asked Guy, curiously.

"Why, I don't know," said she, smiling at his odd question.

"The author seems to think after the marriage of the hero and heroine, all interest is gone. As soon as they are happily or unhappily married, the story ends. If I were to write a story, I would carry it out to the end of their lives; all through their married life until they were an old, white-haired couple."

"That would be interesting, to be sure," said Guy, "but I don't think I ever read such a one. Have you?"

"No, I never have, but I would like to. Do you read much?" asked Marion.

"Yes, a great deal, though not as much as I used to. I have so many other things to do now, that I get very few chances to read as much as I would like."

"I don't suppose I would read so much if I

had something else to do. When father is busy, and I get lonely, I naturally turn to my books for company."

As Guy sat and looked at her, and listened to her voice, he felt his good resolutions deserting him. It was almost impossible to look into those dear eyes and still keep silent. He had never seen such eyes, he told himself. They had looked blue at times and then again he had noticed that they appeared to be perfectly black.

"Miss Marion, I am trying to decide what color your eyes are. Can you help me out?"

"Why, blue, of course," said Marion with surprise, "as if there could be a doubt! What color did you think they were?" she asked.

"I don't know that I was quite sure; that was why I asked your help. Just now they look like two big violets, but I have seen them when they appeared to be black."

Marion laughed merrily. "Perhaps that accounts for what my aunt used to say about them. She has often told me that when I was in a good humor my eyes were blue, and when in a temper they turned black. So you can be on your guard, Mr. Strong; when you see the black eyes, beware! They will be the danger signal, and you will know a storm is brewing."

"Why, I should not imagine that you ever got in a temper," said Guy.

"Ah, that's because you don't know me very well," laughed Marion; "wait until you know me better."

"Very well, but I don't think your black eyes would frighten me very much."

Marion rose, gathered her book and hat, and turned to her companion. "Come, it is getting quite dark, and father will miss me and be anxious about me. Will you come to the house and see father?"

"Thank you, Miss Marion, but I will not come this time; but with your permission I will come around Friday evening. May I?"

"Yes, I will be glad to have you come." Then holding out her hand to him, "Good-by until Friday then, as you cannot come now."

As he took her hand she looked up into his face. She could not fail to read what was written there. She dropped her eyes instantly, and nervously tried to withdraw her hand; but he held it gently but firmly. She knew what to expect now. It came over her like a flash, that this man loved her. She had never thought of it before, and would not have known it then if she had not looked into his eyes and read what was so plainly written there.

"O, Miss Marion, I have fought so hard against this. I had made up my mind not to speak so soon, but when I look into your eyes I am so helpless. I love you, I love you!"

He could say no more just then, for his heart seemed to be bursting. He looked up into her face to read his answer, but he read nothing but pain on every feature.

"Answer me, Marion, for I love you so dearly! If you do not love me now, send me away from you for five, for ten years, but do not take away all hope from me."

He has released her hand. She looks at him

sorrowfully. "O, I am so sorry this has happened. I never dreamed of it, and I would have done much to have saved us both the pain. I do not want to be unkind; but I cannot do as you ask."

Her words fell upon his heart like little icicles, and seemed to freeze it.

"I am not blind to the honor done me—I know that a man cannot pay a woman a greater compliment than to ask her to become his wife. I esteem you highly, and have every confidence in you; but I do not love you—I cannot be your wife."

Guy felt as though all the blood was leaving his heart, despair was stamped on every feature of his face. He knew there was no use pleading for her love. She had answered him, and he knew that ten years hence, her answer would be the same. He could have borne any amount of physical pain and not murmured, but this was mental torture, and what could heal or soften its agonies? He looked up at her and said despairingly:

"If you had loved me I would have devoted all my life to your happiness. But now—my life is worthless. The light has gone out, and I am in utter darkness—I cannot see my way."

The tears trickled down Marion's cheeks and fell with a splash upon the book she held in her hand. She became frightened, she had never seen any one grieve so, especially a man. She caught hold of his arm, and tried to rouse him, for he was so quiet now, and had such a peculiar expression on his face.

"Mr. Strong, look up; don't grieve so. It hurts me to see you look that way. My answer may have seemed unkind; but I don't believe you would want a wife unless she gave you her whole heart along with her hand. Let us be friends still, and let's forget what has just passed."

He looked at her, but with an expression she could not understand.

"Friends," he said in a hollow voice. "Yes, we can be friends, as you say, after this pain has eased a little," pressing his hand to his heart. He took her hand, raised it to his lips, looked at her as though he would take into his remembrance every feature of her face, then left her. He did not return to his home that night. He knew that his mother's loving eyes would see all that he was suffering, and he could not speak of his trouble to anyone, even that dear mother. He sent her a note saying he had gone up to town for a few days, then he wrote to Marion.

When the postman handed her a letter the next day, she opened it with trembling fingers. This was what she read, while the tears rolled down her cheeks:

"I am going away next week, and I shall not see you again; will say good-by. I am going where I can fight out the battle all alone. Perhaps in a year or so I may be stronger than I am now, and will come back then, but not until then. Don't blame yourself for what has happened, for it isn't your fault that I loved you better than all things. GUY STRONG."

She wept bitterly over this letter, and tried to think if she had ever done anything to encour-

age this love, but she had only been kind, nothing more. But it grieved her to think that she had hurt anyone, especially Guy Strong, for she knew him to be worthy of any woman's love, and now she had been the cause of driving him from his home, and making him an exile, though it was done innocently. She hoped he would feel differently in time, and come back and be her same good friend.

Marion had heard from some neighbors that Mrs. Clyde was not well; so she made up her mind to go to the cottage. She had no idea of being cordially received, but she meant to go in spite of anything. She was Philip's mother, and sick, so Marion's mind was made up. She had long forgiven Mrs. Clyde for the treatment she had received at her hands, and she went to the cottage with nothing but good feeling in her heart. When she reached the house she went straight to her aunt's room door, and knocked gently.

"Come in," said a feeble voice.

Marion opened the door and entered. She expected her aunt to fly into a temper when she saw who her visitor was, but she was mistaken. She had been sick off and on for about two months, and had come to realize how lonely and friendless she was, and she realized that it was her own fault that she was friendless. And then she had been thinking of Marion a great deal lately, though she tried to get rid of the thought. She knew that she had made the girl's life a burden to her while in her house, and she was tormented by many such thoughts that would

not be driven away. Marion walked up to the bedside and sat down by her aunt.

"Aunt Janet, I have come over to nurse you, and I am not going to be sent away."

Mrs. Clyde's face showed that she was glad that she had come.

"I am glad you have come, Marion, though I did not expect it of you. I have been sick for quite a while, and I have thought of you a great deal lately, and wish now that I had been kinder to you. But I know you will forgive me, for it is your nature to forgive."

"Indeed, dear aunt, I have forgiven you long ago; and would have come before this, but was afraid you would not want me. Now let me do something for your comfort first, then we can talk afterwards. Where is the girl that you had with you?"

"She left two days ago, and I have been alone ever since," said Mrs. Clyde in a whining voice.

"O, dear, this will never do! You must have another girl at once. I will see about it as soon as I get everything fixed comfortably. I know where you keep everything, so I shall go down and make you some nice hot tea, and get some fresh crackers. I know you must need something. I had no idea you were sick and all *alone*. I will be back in a few minutes."

In a little while Marion was back with a dainty repast, and Mrs. Clyde seemed to enjoy being waited upon, and ate what was set before her with a relish.

"Now," said Marion, "while you are doing justice to my lunch, I am going down stairs and

see if I can't fix up things a bit. Everything is topsy turvy down there."

She went down and in a little while she had things in order. When she had finished, before going back, she went to the library, and up to the mantle-piece, over which the picture of a handsome boy was hanging. She stood and gazed at it long and lovingly, then murmured to herself,

"He will be coming home soon. God, help me to hold out against him! I love him so, but I must not give in."

With a sigh she turned and left the room and went upstairs. She removed the dishes, fixed her aunt more comfortable on her pillows, then sat down and chatted a while. Then she arose.

"Aunty, I will go now; but I shall send you one of our own servants, one that I know to be trustworthy. She will do anything you want done. I shall come again to-morrow to see how you are. Try to go to sleep now, and I am sure you will be all right in a day or two."

"Marion, you are a good girl. You know, I was wondering what was going to become of me just before you came in. But I feel better now; so run along home, child; you have a long walk, and it may be dark before you reach home."

"O, I shall not have to walk home, for I rode over, but I will go now, and come again to-morrow. Good-by," kissing her aunt on the cheek.

"Good-by, and God bless you," said Mrs. Clyde, huskily.

Early the next morning Marion was on her way to the cottage. Mrs. Clyde was up and about the house, but her face was haggard and

drawn; there was a hunted look in her eyes. She seemed to have suffered mentally, as well as physically. Marion came in with a basket on her arm; her face was all aglow from the exercise.

"See, aunty, what I have brought you—some of the most delicious strawberries and some nice rich cream. The strawberries came out of my own garden. There are a few other dainties in the basket I thought perhaps you might relish."

"Yes, indeed, I know I shall. My appetite is very poor, but I know I shall enjoy what you have brought."

Marion spent the rest of the morning at the cottage. Mrs. Clyde was kind now instead of harsh, and she seemed to appreciate every little thing done for her comfort. Marion could not understand the change in her, but she was glad there was a change. They talked of Philip and his coming home, which was so near at hand, and Mrs. Clyde seemed never to tire of the subject. Marion was very careful of how she spoke, and Mrs. Clyde never dreamed that her heart gave sudden bounds every time his name was mentioned.

It is four years since Philip left home for school, and he is expected back at any hour, any minute. Mrs. Clyde looks forward eagerly to his return. Her health has been getting worse instead of better, and she longs to have her child with her again. She feels that she hasn't very many more years to live, for the doctors have told her as much, and as each day passes, she can feel her strength leaving her.

Marion made her way to her favorite nook, a

rustic bench, almost completely covered by a honey suckle vine. The vine grew on a trellis, built in the shape of an arch, and formed a shelter from sun and rain. She sat on the bench, with one arm on the back of the seat, and her face resting in her hand; the other lay idly in her lap. Finally, her eyes closed, her head fell forward on her arm, and she was asleep. She had slept some little time when a shadow fell across the opening in the vine that formed the door. The next minute Philip stood before the sleeping girl; still she did not wake. He looked down at her with his whole heart in his eyes. How beautiful she was; and she was his, too; yes, he meant to have her, if he had to wait a lifetime to get her. He had loved her too long and too well to resign her to anyone else. He sat down by her, put his arms around her gently, drew her to him, and held her close to his heart. She opened her eyes, looked up into his face with a look of perfect ecstasy, but for only a minute—the next she was trying to free herself. But he only held her closer, and pressed her to him as though he would never let her go.

"O, let me go, let me go, Philip—you have no right to hold me against my will!" she panted, for he had almost crushed the breath out of her.

For answer he bent his head down, rubbed his face against her soft cheek, then his lips sought hers, and rested there. What could she do, against his strength; and she was happy that he was able to hold her so; she could do nothing, and she was glad it was so, for wasn't she in his

arms, the one she loved better than anything on earth?

Finally, he released her, and she jumped to her feet, her whole frame in a tremor. She picked up her hat, as if to leave him, but he cried to her:

"Don't go, Marion; don't leave me. It is four long years since I have seen you, and I have wearied for a sight of you."

She came back and stood at the side of the bench, and looked down upon him. He took her hand and rubbed it all over his face.

"Sweetheart, are you glad to see me? O, I have thought of you so constantly, but I don't believe you are glad that I have come."

She took his large strong hand, and laid her face in the palm of it.

"Yes, Phil, you know I am glad to have you back; but I am a child no longer, and you mustn't kiss me as you did a while ago. It isn't right."

"I'm going to kiss you every chance I get," said Philip; "so you needn't tell me not to. You belong to me, and I'm going to have you if I have to wait twenty years."

Marion looks away from him and says nothing. Philip continues,

"Marion, I would give almost anything to be able to read your heart, and know whether you love me or not. Sometimes I feel that you do, and then again I am in doubt. A little while ago, while I held you in my arms, I saw something in your eyes that made my heart leap, but in a minute it was gone. Marion, I believe that you love me, but for some foolish reason of your own, you are keeping it from me."

Marion pulls at the ribbons on her hat nervously, with her eyes still on the ground. She is afraid to look up. It is so hard to fight against him. Philip catches her hand.

"Am I right, Marion?"

She drops her head lower, and lower, until it rests on his shoulder for a minute or two; but he pretends not to notice it, for he is waiting for his answer. As if just realizing her position, she raises her head suddenly, and says quite calmly, but with her eyes away from his,

"I love you, yes, but not in the way you mean. You are my cousin, and it is a cousin's love I have for you; but don't let's talk about it any more."

"Very well," said Philip, "I won't say any more just now; come sit down, and tell me all about yourself. Are you happy here, as Mr. Vernon's daughter?"

"O, yes, happier than I ever dreamed of being," said she.

"So happy," said Philip, reproachfully, "that you never even thought of me while I was away."

"You are mistaken, Phil, for indeed, I thought of you many times, and father and I have often talked about you."

"Then why didn't you answer my letters? I wrote three times, and never received a line from you."

"I never was much for writing letters, you know," she answered, "and I knew Aunt Janet would tell you all the news. I may have been wrong there, for I suppose I should have answered them."

"Yes, indeed," said he, "for I used to watch

every mail anxiously, until finally I gave up in despair. I knew you did not intend writing. Marion, you are a puzzle to me—I wish I could understand you."

"Don't try to, for it won't do you any good—but come, let's go and see father. He is anxious to see you."

"I will go with you, but don't ask me not to talk of my love for you. I will say no more about it this time, but certainly will next time. You will be kinder to me next time, won't you, sweetheart? Think how much I love you. I cannot live without you, so please don't ask me to. Come on, I am ready to go with you."

She walked to the house by his side, but both were silent. Mr. Vernon came out and met them as they came up the steps. He caught hold of both of Philip's hands.

"Welcome home, my boy; welcome home." Then turning to Marion, "Why, pet, we should have killed the fatted calf, and had a regular feast, eh?"

Marion laughed. "It is too late now, dear father; but I think I can get up a nice little lunch that will please our guest. You see, I know just what he likes best, so I will leave you two to talk over old times, and I will hunt up Mrs. Carter, and get her help. I won't be gone long."

After a little she came back with the most delicious lunch, a lunch fit to tempt any palate. Mrs. Carter joined the party, and it was quite late when Philip at last got up to take leave of his friends. He had hoped to get one last word with Marion before leaving, but was disappointed, so

when he took her hand his eyes showed what his lips fain would have said. She saw the love shining in his eyes, and a faint flush overspread her face as he pressed her hand softly and bade her good-night.

One morning, a few days later, when Marion went down to breakfast, she found a note lying on her plate. Mr. Vernon and Mrs. Carter were already seated, waiting on her, when she came in. She picked up the note and read it.

"When was this brought to the house, Mrs. Carter?"

"A boy on horseback brought it about half an hour ago; he said it was from the cottage," said Mrs. Carter.

"Yes," said Marion, "Mrs. Clyde is sick, and has sent for me. I shall go to her as soon as I finish breakfast."

"You had better ride over, my dear, for it is a warm day, and a long walk," said Mr. Vernon.

"I think I will walk, father. I have a slight headache, and am in hopes the exercise will relieve it. I shall not take the big road; but the little foot path that runs along the side under the shade of the big trees."

"Is there anything you want to take with you, any cream, jam, or anything of that sort. I know those kind of things generally come in very handy when anyone is sick."

"Yes, thank you, Mrs. Carter; I will take some cream along, and a bottle of wine, if you can fix them up for me in a hurry. Please put them in a small basket, something that will be handy for me to carry."

In ten minutes' time Marion was on her way to the cottage. She enjoyed the walk, tripping along lightly in the little narrow path under the cool, shady trees. The little wood violets nodded their heads at her as she passed by. She plucked some of them and put them in her bosom. She thinks of Philip as she trips along and wonders whether she will see him or not. She knows that he has work in town, for he is a lawyer now; but surely he will be at home if his mother is very sick. She hasn't seen him since their first interview in the garden. She has reached the cottage. As she goes up the steps she sees a familiar form through the library window. Her heart stood still for a minute, but she went on into the house, trying her best to calm herself. Philip met her at the door.

"Good-morning, Marion; come in here and sit down," taking the basket from her arm, and putting it on the table.

"I haven't time, Philip, for Aunt Janet sent for me. I must go to her first."

"Yes, I know; but mother is asleep just now. I left her room not long ago. Jane will let you know when she wakes."

"Is she seriously sick?" asked Marion.

"I'm afraid she is. I tell you the truth, Marion; I don't understand her sickness at all. She has such a strange way of talking to herself here of late—no, I cannot call it talking; it is mumbling, for I cannot understand one word she says. She talks of you so much, too—always asking when you are coming, and seems to have you on her mind continually. Poor mama, I

really believe she is sorry for the way she used to treat you. For I knew you were not happy with us, and was glad when I heard you had left —glad for your sake. You didn't know it, but it used to grieve me so, when mother used to speak so cross to you," said he earnestly.

"O, don't talk so; I dare say I was as much to blame as aunty."

"No, little girl, you were never to blame. I used to look at you and wonder if you really were an angel or just an ordinary girl. You bore your hardships so patiently and bravely. I think that is what made me love you so dearly." Then, holding out his arms in a pleading way, "Come here, dearest. O, Marion, why is it that you are so kind to others and so cruel to me? Won't you come to me, and let me hold you just a minute?"

She stood at the side of the table, pulling the little violets to pieces with nervous fingers. She looked at him in a helpless way, as though the temptation was too great for resistance, then yielded to an impulse too strong for her—she walked into his outstretched arms. She let him hold her a minute, then struggled out of his arms and slipped from the room, and left him alone. She met the servant girl, Jane, in the hall, and learned that Mrs. Clyde was awake and asking for her. She went to her aunt's room, entered, and closed the door behind her softly.

"Is that you, Marion," said a feeble, fretful voice from the bed.

"Yes, aunty, dear," said Marion.

"O, I thought you never would come."

"I have been in the house some little time; but you were asleep, so I would not disturb you."

"Come, sit by me; but first, let in a little light. It is so dark, I cannot see your face."

As Marion opened the shutters, a ray of light fell on her aunt's face, and she noticed how pinched and haggard the features were. She must have suffered a great deal, she thinks, to have changed thus in so short a time. She sat on the side of the bed and took her aunt's hand.

"Are you suffering any pain now, aunty?"

"No, not just now; I think I suffer more from my thoughts than I do from any physical pain. Marion, I committed a great wrong years ago. It did not bother me then—but now I am getting old, and know that I haven't long to live, and the thought of my sin torments me day and night. I cannot find any rest. I am afraid to die—afraid of the punishment God will deal out to me in his just wrath. What shall I do, for I know my days are numbered."

"O, aunty, I am sure you have never done any real crime. I dare say it is some little wrong, magnified a hundred times because you are sick and your nerves all unstrung," said Marion, trying to comfort her. "Don't worry about it, it can do no good, but a great deal of harm."

"O, child, you don't understand—how could you, you who would not willingly hurt a little ant in your path. Marion, suppose anyone had done you a wrong—do you think you could forgive them?"

"Why, yes, if I knew they were sorry for it, and wanted my forgiveness."

"But suppose it was some great wrong against you," anxiously.

"Still I could forgive it, if they were truly repentant. God's book says we must forgive, not seven times, but seventy times seven," said Marion.

"Child, do you think God could forgive me for what I have done; tell me quick!"

"I don't know what you have done, aunt, but rest assured, God will forgive it, if you repent and ask his forgiveness. Surely if a weak child like myself can forgive a wrong, you cannot doubt God's willingness to forgive you. We are all his children, rich and poor alike. Tell me this—Can you think of anything in this world that Philip could do, and you not forgive him if he were to tell you he was sorry and begged your forgiveness. Answer truly now."

"No, no, nothing—I could forgive him anything in this world."

"Why, of course you could. Well, now, what is your love for your child compared to God's love for his children—God, whose love is all powerful?"

"I never thought of it in that light."

"But you should, dear aunt. If you have really committed some wrong, why don't you pray and ask God's forgiveness? You won't pray in vain."

"I pray? I don't think I ever prayed in my life, except when I was a little child, and my mother was alive. I am sure I have never prayed since then."

"O, Aunt Janet! I am surprised and grieved

to hear you talk so. I thought everybody prayed, sometimes. Why, I pray for every little thing I want; it doesn't matter how small and trifling it is."

"Are all your prayers answered?"

"Most of them are. God answers all he knows will be for my good."

"Child, I wish I had your faith," in a hopeless tone.

"Have you a Bible in the house, aunty?"

"Yes, there's one stored away somewhere in the house, but I can't tell you where."

"I am going to find it, and I want you to promise me that you will read it every day and pray also. God will forgive you, but not until you ask for that forgiveness. Simply being sorry for your sin is not enough—God expects more than that. Will you do as I ask?"

"Yes, yes, I will try. Bring the Bible and put it where I can reach it when I want it. I am tired now—I will try and sleep a little. I feel better since talking with you." She turned over on her side, with her face to the wall.

"All right, I will do as you ask, then leave you so you can sleep. I shall come again soon."

She quietly left the room and went to search for the Bible. She found it stowed away with some old papers and magazines on the back shelf of the little closet. It was covered with dust and mold, as though it had not seen daylight in years. She took it out, wiped it off nice and clean, put a piece of ribbon as a book mark at the twenty-third psalm, and carried it up to Mrs. Clyde's room, and put it on the table by the side of the

bed. As she did so she thought of her own little Bible, and how precious it was to her; the same little Bible that Philip had given her on her birthday. He had asked her what she would like best, thinking of course, she would say a doll baby; but surprised him by asking for a little Bible of her own. He gave it to her, and wrote her name in it, and it had been one of her treasures ever since.

She hurried downstairs, and had gotten as far as the gate when Philip called to her from the window:

"Marion, wait just a minute; I want to see you."

He went out to the gate where she was standing.

"What do you think about mother? Is her sickness anything very serious, you think?"

"I hardly know what to say, Philip," said Marion, with downcast eyes.

"I know her lungs are affected, because Dr. Wells told me so, but I have known persons to live on for years with lung troubles. He did not say there was any immediate danger. I wish I knew, for I cannot work properly, knowing mother is sick, and needs me. You see, my work keeps me in town, and a good ways from home," he said.

"I don't know very much about sickness, Philip; but it seems to me aunty is in a bad way," said Marion. "I was startled this morning when I opened the window and the light fell on her face—her features were drawn and haggard, and

there was a look about her eyes I have never seen before."

"O, Marion, you don't know how your words hurt, and yet I have noticed the same things you speak of. Mother is all I have in this world, and I cannot bear to think of her dying and leaving me."

"I hope we both may be wrong. But if I were in your place, I would procure a trained nurse at once. She needs constant attention, and besides you would feel much more satisfied if you had a competent nurse at hand."

"Yes, you are right. I will do exactly as you say. Then I won't worry so when I am away from her, for I know she will be in good hands. I should have been at the office to-day, but was afraid to leave mother sick with no one in the house but Jane."

"How are you getting on in your work, Phil?"

"Splendidly! Far above my expectations. I hope to make a name for myself some day."

"I am sure you will, but I must be going, for I told father I would be back in time for lunch. I will come over just as often as I can, and I trust Aunt Janet will be much improved when I come again."

"Yes, I hope so. I am sure your coming does mother much good. Good-by."

He caught her hand and pressed it for a minute, then let her go.

As soon as Marion reached home she went to her father's study, and told him all that had passed between Mrs. Clyde and herself. When she had finished, he brought his fists down on

the study table, with a force that made it tremble.

"Just as sure as my name is Vernon, Mrs. Clyde had done you a wrong! I don't know what it is, but the wrong she spoke about was committed against you—*you,* I say. I see it all clearly now."

"What wrong could she do me, father?"

"What wrong? Why, she could wrong you in hundreds of ways. Why in the world didn't you ask her what it was she had done so wrong; she might have told you?"

"I did not think about it. Perhaps she will discuss the subject again, and then I shall ask her."

"If she does, don't let the chance slip. There is a mystery somewhere, and I would like to solve it. I have often wondered why it was that she seemed to have no love for you, and yet she did not want to give you up to anyone else. I would give a great deal to know all that she knows," scratching his head, with a worried look on his face. "Look here, girlie, do you suppose Philip knows anything about this mystery?"

"I am sure he does not, for he used to get scoldings every time he asked his mother anything about me, and I am sure she has never told him anything about this sin of hers."

"Well, well, I suppose there is no way for us to find out any more about it. Perhaps she may tell you herself some day. I have never understood Mrs. Clyde, though I loved her boy dearly. He got all his good traits from his father."

Just then the luncheon bell rings out.

"Come, there is the bell, and I am hungry, too."

"So am I," said Marion; "my walk has given me an appetite."

They went down to lunch, arm in arm.

It has rained constantly for the last week—a steady downpour. Marion has not been able to go over to the cottage, and she hasn't received any word as to her aunt's condition. She feels sure that Mrs. Clyde cannot be any worse, else Philip would have sent her word.

It is Sunday morning. At last the sun has shown himself, and is shining bright and beautiful.

"Here is the beautiful sun at last!" Marion exclaimed to Mrs. Carter. "I must run to the cottage before he changes his mind and hides himself again behind the clouds."

She picked up her hat lying on the chair, but before leaving, went to Mr. Vernon's study, kissed him, and told him not to look for her under two hours.

"All right, little girl; stay four hours if you like; but be sure and come back at last. Give my best wishes to Mrs. Clyde, and my love to Philip."

"All right, bye, bye, till I see you again."

Marion walked along briskly. She was half way to the cottage when she heard someone call her name, "Marion." She looked in the direction of the sound and saw Philip stretched full length on the ground under a large spreading tree. He was smiling brightly at her, and beck-

oning her to come to him. She hesitated a moment, then crossed the road and went to him.

"Philip Clyde, you will catch your death of cold, lying on that wet ground! Don't you know it has been raining steadily for a week? Get up!" And she stamped her little foot in command, but he only laughs at her.

"Don't you worry, sweetheart; it is quite dry where I am. It never gets very wet directly under these big trees—the great branches take the place of an umbrella. See?" catching at her hand, playfully. "I have brushed off all the wet leaves, and underneath is quite dry." Then, jumping to his feet, "I am going to fix a place for you now," and he clears away a good sized space and takes off his coat and lays it down for her to sit upon. "Now, then, there is a nice dry seat. Come, sit down and let's have a chat.'

"I haven't time to stop, Phil, for I was on my way to see your mother. I had no idea of meeting you out here. I know she must be better, or you would not be out."

"Yes, she is much better. She is sitting up in bed to-day, and Dr. Wells says she can go downstairs to-morrow. I think your last visit did her more good than all the medicine she has taken."

"Did you get the nurse for her?"

"Yes, she is with her now. I thought perhaps you might come over to-day, so I strolled out in the hope of meeting you."

They have chatted nearly an hour when Philip says suddenly,

"Marion, I am going to ask you a question. Will you answer it?"

"I don't know whether I will or not. It all depends on the question."

Then looking her in the eyes, "Marion, do you love me or not?"

"That certainly is an abrupt question, and I don't feel called upon to answer it."

"At least you don't deny it," said he, hopefully.

"I neither deny or affirm it."

"O, sweetheart, you know I love you, and want you to be my little wife. Even when I was a little boy I used to think of the little home I would have some day, and you as its mistress. I feel the same way now. I have never even thought of another woman. I know you are happy where you are, but I believe I could make you even happier if you would only let me. Will you?"

She is silent. She knows that he could make her happy—no one knows it better than she does. She could be happy on a desert island if he were with her, to hold her hand, or to speak to her. He watched her as she sat so still and silent. Suddenly his expression changed, an idea had occurred to him.

"Marion, tell me this—has someone else won your love while I was away?"

"Philip, you haven't the right to ask me such a question," rather indignantly.

"Yes, I have. Can't you see that my life's happiness depends on your answer? Answer me

truly, for heaven's sake—anything is better than this uncertainty."

"Well—no. I do not love anyone else."

His face lights up.

"You will be my little wife then."

"No, I haven't said so. You do not love me—you think you do, but I know better. I now occupy the place of a beloved daughter in Mr. Vernon's home, but I cannot forget that I was once nothing better than a servant in your own home. You used to tell me then, out of pity, that some day you would marry me, and now you are trying to fulfil that promise. But I am proud, and if I did love you I would not marry you."

"O, Marion, my darling, are you going to let your foolish pride wreck the happiness of us both? Think well what you are doing. I believe from my heart that you love me, and it is just your foolish pride that is keeping us apart. Marion, I shall never, never give you up until you tell me with your lips that you despise me. Do you hear?"

"Yes, but I cannot help it. You asked me to answer your question, and I have done so."

She arose, picked up his coat and handed it to him.

"I must be going now. I shall run up to the house and see aunty before I go back home. I did not intend stopping here so long. I shall have to hurry to get back home in time for dinner, as father will be waiting for me."

Philip is silent as they walk on to the cottage together.

When they reach the gate, he looked up into

her face as though he expected some little word, but her eyes were turned in the other direction. She left him and went to Mrs. Clyde's room.

Philip went to his own room and with a sigh threw himself on the bed. He was miserable.

When Marion came downstairs a few minutes later everything was very quiet, and no one was in sight. Her heart sank a little, for she had hoped Philip would wait to say good-by. But he had disappeared, and she knew she must have hurt him with the answer she gave him. Her thoughts were anything but bright as she hurried along home. She felt sure now that Mrs. Clyde had injured her in some way, but in what way she could not tell. O, if her aunt would only speak and make things clear to her, how joyful she would be; for then she could give Philip the answer he craved, and they could be so happy. But there was one thought that worried her more than the others—suppose her aunt should die, and the secret she spoke of never be known. Marion was sure it concerned her, and her one prayer was that Mrs. Clyde would speak before it was too late.

Mr. Vernon was watching for Marion as she came in sight. He went down the walk to meet her, and put his arm about her lovingly. He felt sure that Mrs. Clyde would speak sooner or later. He had been thinking a great deal lately, and he was almost confident that he had guessed what the secret was that tormented her so, but he refrained from saying anything about it to Marion, for fear he should be wrong, so he decided to wait patiently for developments.

"Well, birdie, you are back at last, eh?" said he fondly, for his very life was wrapped up in this sweet girl. "How did you find your patient?"

"Very much better, she is sitting up to-day. But father, she looks dreadfully! I don't think Philip realizes how sick she is. In her ways she is a different woman. She is so gentle and kind now, and she used to be so harsh, and indifferent to anyone's feelings. I don't think she ever loved anyone but Philip."

"She is a peculiar woman, to be sure," said he, "if she could live in the house with you so long and not love you. She surely must have just steeled her heart against you," said he.

"Everybody may not think me as lovable as you do, dear father," looking into his face with a winning smile.

"If anyone can know you well and not love you, there is something wrong with them, mark my word," said he, emphatically.

"I am glad you have such a good opinion of me, and as long as you love me I shall be satisfied."

"You will always have my love to fall back on, little one. I think I shall go over and see Mrs. Clyde to-morrow. I want to see Philip also, so I can congratulate him. I hear he is going right ahead in his work."

"I will go with you if you are willing, for I promised to go over to-morrow, and sit awhile."

"Very well. I shall start immediately after breakfast, so don't keep me waiting. After leav-

ing there I will go up to town on some business, and stop for you on my way back."

"All right, sir, I shall be ready as soon as you are," and she pinched his cheek, playfully, and left him to read his papers.

It is a month later. Mrs. Clyde's health has not improved; but instead, has failed more and more each day, until now she is quite an invalid. Marion spends a large part of her time with her, and she is grateful for every little thing done for her comfort. Marion met Philip several times at the cottage while on her visits to his mother, but she would give him no chance to get a word with her alone. She knew what he wanted to say, so she avoided being left alone with him. She was not sure she could go through another interview like the last she had with him, and come out victorious. She did not feel strong enough to resist his pleadings and the pleadings of her own heart many more times. Philip soon saw what she was after, so he made up his mind that he would see her, and see her alone, and in a very short time.

Marion is in the library, reading. Mr. Vernon and Mrs. Carter have gone to town together.

Marion read on for a little while, then laid the book down on her lap with a sigh. Just then the door opened and Philip walked in. He closed it after him, walked up to where she was, sat down by her and took possession of her hands.

"Marion, you have been avoiding me of late, and I know why. But I meant to see you alone, so when Mr. Vernon and Mrs. Carter passed

home going into town I knew this was my chance."

She sits still while he holds her hands, but she keeps her eyes out of the window, and does not look at him.

"Sweetheart, I came over to talk with you, and I want you to be kind to me. I have come for the last time to ask you to be my wife. I cannot bear this suspense. I believe with all my heart that you love me, and I ask you once more, and for the last time, will you be my little wife? Answer me, but let the answer come from your heart, for God's sake. Think what it means to me—and to you, too." Then kneeling, and looking up into her face imploringly, "O, Marion, my darling, what is life to me without you? The little cottage has never seemed the same to me since you left it. And what is life to me with you?" His face lights up with joy; "everything that is bright and beautiful. Look into my eyes, beloved, and let me read my answer; look up, dearie."

She looked up at him, but he could read nothing there. Her face was white and strained, and her lips parched and dry, as she whispered faintly, "I cannot—I cannot."

"Marion, for heaven's sake, don't answer me like that—give me some good reason for refusing me. If you do not love me at all, *say so;* but give me some reason. Don't let pride ruin the happiness of us both. Tell me why you cannot give yourself to me."

"Answer my question first, and I will answer

yours," said Marion. "Where would I be to-day if it were not for the goodness of Mr. Vernon?"

"Why, at my home, I suppose," said Philip, wonderingly; "and my wife, if I had things my way."

"Yes, at your home, my time spent in the kitchen, as your mother's cook, housekeeper, maid of all work. Do you think I can forget that? No, I am proud, lots prouder than you think. Understand me, I am not blaming Aunt Janet for anything; but you wanted my reasons for not marrying you, so now you have them."

"And so you are going to make me suffer for what mother has done? I would have had things differently if it had been in my power; but I was only a boy, and could do nothing. I meant to take you away from her as soon as I was through school, and working for myself. And now that I love you so dearly and want you so much you let a little pride stand in the way of our happiness! Marion, listen to me—if you send me away from you this time, you send me away forever. It is left with you whether I go or stay. If I go, I shall never come back, so help me God!" said he desperately.

Marion became frightened at his tone, for he had always been so gentle with her.

"O, don't talk that way; you could not go away and leave your mother—it would kill her."

"No, I couldn't, and I wouldn't leave her. Dr. Wells told me two days ago that mother must have a change of climate, and as soon as possible. I am going to take her to Cannes, but I will not leave without my answer. It is for you to say,

whether I am to return or to stay away forever. Which shall it be?"

"Philip, you surely don't mean that if I refuse to marry you, you will leave your home, and go among strangers for the rest of your life—you cannot mean that?"

"That is exactly what I shall do."

He looks at her in a wondering way. "Do you think I could go on living here, seeing you day after day, loving you like I do, and know that you will never be anything to me? No, that's a little more than I could bear. I have no ties here, mother is all I have besides you. I can sell the cottage and buy a home somewhere else. O, Marion," pleadingly, "don't send me away, but bid me stay. We can love and be so happy."

"Philip," said Marion, tenderly, "I shall never send you away. If you go it will be because you want to, and not from any fault of mine. I have told you more than once that I cannot marry you—I shall marry no one. But that is no reason for you to make exiles of yourself and mother. You will be doing her a great wrong. I don't want you to go away, and I cannot believe that you really mean what you say. You will think better of it by and by."

"Is your answer final, Marion," said Philip in a hoarse voice, and he looked desperate enough to do anything, for all the hopes that he had lived on for years were being trampled on by the girl in front of him, and he saw no chance of making her change her mind. He knew her well enough to know that once she made a decision, it wasn't likely she would ever change it. After he left

her presence with no word of hope from her, he knew he would not care what became of him.

"Yes, Philip," said Marion tearfully, "my answer is final. I am sorry if I cause you any pain, but I cannot do as you ask."

"You *will* not, why don't you say," and he looked at her as though he would like to fell her with his eyes. He wasn't the gentle Philip she had known any longer. He was besides himself, and did not realize how he looked at her and spoke to her.

"You really mean what you say—will nothing move you?" as though loath to consider her answer final.

"No, nothing will move me," she said faintly, for she had almost broken down. She knew she could not stand the strain much longer.

"Very well," said he in a voice she never would have recognized as his, "I shall take mother away from here just a soon as I can make arrangements to leave—and I would go to-day if it were possible. I shall never seek you again, but should you change your mind in the next five days, for I cannot leave before then, you can send for me. But if not, you will never see me again, unless you send for me yourself. You have wrecked my whole life to-day with your cruel answer—good-by," and his eyes seemed to flash fire. He rushed from the room, leaped upon his horse, and tore down the road at a terrific speed. He was not aware of how fast he was going, or the direction his horse was taking. His brain was on fire, and it had to be cooled in some way. He went on and on, miles and miles past his home,

and would have continued going if his faithful old horse hadn't given a sudden lurch, and come almost to a standstill. It was panting, and its body was covered with foam. The sudden slackening of speed brought Philip to his senses. He leaned over and patted his horse's neck lovingly, saying, "Poor old Nemo, you are almost fagged out, aren't you? Your master's brain and heart were on fire, and he did not know what he was doing. Go along just as slow as you want to now, old fellow. No need for you to suffer because I do."

He let the lines rest on Nemo's neck, and they went along the cool shady road at a slow pace. The ride had helped to ease the pain in his heart somewhat. He was calm now, and as he rode along he made plans as to what he would do with his life. He knew there would never be any real happiness for him now. He was a man without hope or aim in life; but he knew he must live, and then there was his mother—she needed him if no one else did. At the end of his ride he had decided that he would never look on Marion's face again. He would take his mother and go away among strangers, where there would be new faces, and new scenes, with nothing to remind him of his past life, or of Marions' cruelty. But when his mother left the cottage it was to go to her last resting place, and not to Cannes, as Philip had planned.

As soon as he reached home he went straight to his mother to find out if she wanted anything, for he feared now that he had left her too long, and that she might have wanted him during his

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absence. But she assured him that she wanted nothing just then, so he sat down by her and took her hand and held it in his strong one. He was very silent, and his mother noticed that the hand that held hers trembled very much, and every now and then he would brush his other hand across his forehead in a restless way, as though something were troubling him. She watched him wonderingly, for she had never seen him like that before. She supposed he was worried about her, because Dr. Wells had spoken very freely concerning her condition, and had given very little encouragement. It never entered her mind that her boy was in love, and least of all, with Marion. She had always looked upon him as a child, and had never given such a thing a thought. Philip had always loved his mother dearly, but he could never bring himself to talk of his love to her. He would always think of the dislike he showed towards Marion until recently, and that kept him silent.

His heart failed him every time he looked at his mother, and saw how fragile she was, a mere shadow of herself. Suppose she should not be able to take the long journey to Cannes? What should he do then? How could he live on and run the chance of meeting Marion again?

"Mother, dear, do you think you will be able to travel in five days? Can't you make a great effort, and gain some strength, so we can get away from here? I am sure you would improve if I could get you away. But there is the long journey, and you seem so weak."

"Yes, yes, my child, I am as weak as any baby.

I am afraid you will have to give up the trip. I could never stand it, Philip, my boy." She looked at him lovingly, and patted his hand. "Don't build any hopes, my child, for you won't have a mother much longer; don't look at me that way, for I know what I am saying." Then, putting her hand on her heart, "I feel it in here; have felt it for days. But I am not afraid to die now. A few months ago I dreaded such a thing—I do not now."

"O, mother, you are breaking my heart," sobbed Philip, covering his face with his hands, his whole form shaken with his emotion.

"Do you love me so much, my darling?" asked Mrs. Clyde with a world of sorrow in her voice, for she loved him so dearly.

"O, mama, how can you ask me that?" Then, looking up at her, "Have I anyone in this world besides you? Anyone I know loves me as you do? Don't talk of leaving me all alone."

"I won't, any more, if it grieves you so, dearest; just promise me that you will always love me the same, whatever happens. Always remember that I loved you better than my own life."

"I don't have to promise, dear mother. You have my love now, and shall always have it. Do you think I could forget what you have been to me all these years. I would not be worthy the name of son if I could forget. But, mother, cheer up! Don't be so down-hearted. You are comparatively a young woman and should not think of dying for years to come."

Philip forced a smile on his face in the hope of cheering her. She smiled back at him faintly,

and asked him to turn her over on her side. She felt one of her weak spells coming on. She had overtaxed her strength. Philip did as she asked, then closed the shutters so as to obstruct all light, drew the muslin curtains, and quietly left the room.

Let us go back to Marion. Philip wasn't suffering alone. Marion's heart was almost rent from what she had just gone through. When Philip left her after receiving his answer, she sat staring into vacancy. She was as if stunned, all feeling seemed to have left her. Suddenly she clasped her hands together over her heart, and raised her eyes imploringly, "Oh, God! help us both to bear this pain patiently. He thinks I am cruel, and do not love him—he doesn't know how I am suffering along with him, and for him. How could he know when I have seemed so cold!"

Her thoughts go back for a minute to that other one who had left home and loved ones for her sake. From the day he confessed his love for her she had never seen or heard one word from him. And now she was sending another away, the one she loved best of all in the world.

"O, Philip," she cried in her misery, "surely you will not go away and leave me. If you love me as you say you do, you will not go. No," as she jumped to her feet, "you shall not go—at least, not until you have held me to your heart once more, and kissed me."

With her hands clasped behind her back, and her lips pressed tightly together, she walked from one end of the library to the other, back and

forth, excitedly. She was so worried and excited that she did not hear the carriage wheels on the drive, and she started nervously when she heard Mr. Vernon's voice in the hall calling for her. It was impossible to let him see her then, for his eyes were keen, where she was concerned, and he would be sure to notice her agitation, and not only wonder at it, but insist on knowing the cause. It was impossible to reach her room by going through the halls, for she was sure to meet him or Mrs. Carter. Just then she remembered the little door covered by a portiere that led into the drawing room. She slipped through that and then through another door that led into the dining room. Then she felt safe, for it was no trouble now to get to her room. As soon as she reached it, she locked it securely, to keep anyone from disturbing her, for she had to make haste to drive away all traces of tears and worry, and to meet her father with the usual smile. She heard him call her two or three times, and was afraid he would think she was unwell, and come up to see about her. She went down after a little, and was the same bright Marion to all appearances. Mr. Vernon never dreamed of the dull pain in her heart, and the effort she was making to hide it.

It is three days later. Each day that passed Philip looked anxiously for some word from Marion, but in vain. Mrs. Clyde had grown steadily worse each day, and Dr. Wells informed Philip that to move her in her weakened condition would mean certain death. Marion did not go to the cottage after her interview with Philip,

but Mr. Vernon went daily, and she learned through him that Philip could not take his mother away. O, how thankful she was that he could not carry out his threat, though it grieved her to know that her aunt was so ill. She was worrying also, for of course she should be at the cottage, and her aunt might have needed her but how could she go in his house and meet him face to face? She could not do it, not unless she was sent for. And she was sent for sooner than she expected.

Marion and Mr. Vernon were seated at the dinner table two days later, when Mrs. Carter brought in a note and handed it to Mr. Vernon and then left the room. He did not have his glasses handy, so he gave it over to Marion to read for him. She read as follows:

"Dear Mr. Vernon:—Come over and bring Marion with you as soon as possible. Mother begs to see you. I fear she hasn't many more hours to live. PHILIP."

The note fell to the floor, as Marion covered her face with her hands and sobbed.

"Don't cry, little girl—you must be brave for poor Philip's sake. Run along and get ready, or we may be too late."

He rose from the table and went to where Marion was seated, and took her hands from her face.

"Listen to me, my child; go and get ready; we haven't a minute to waste. I may be wrong, but I believe we shall hear Mrs. Clyde's story to-day, and it concerns you, too. She knows death is

near, and she will confess before leaving this world."

Marion rose and wiped her eyes and started upstairs, to do as her father advised.

"I shall have the carriage around to the front in less than ten minutes, so make haste," and he went to the stable.

When Marion and her father drove up to the cottage a half hour later Philip came forward to meet them. Marion noticed with pain that his face was unusually white, and there were great dark circles under his eyes. He took Mr. Vernon's outstretched hand, but did not let his eyes rest on Marion for a minute. They went in in silence, and up to his mother's room. As they reached the door Philip turned to Mr. Vernon,

"Mother asked to see you two alone, so I will be in the library in case you should need me."

"Very well," said Mr. Vernon in a low tone.

As they went in, the nurse arose and left the room.

"You have come, and I am so glad," said Mrs. Clyde in a feeble voice.

"Yes, we came just as soon as we received your message," said Mr. Vernon; "you are not suffering any great pain, are you?"

"No, not now; the pain is all gone. But for one thing, I am ready to die," and an expression of pain passed over her face, as though she had a difficult task to perform.

Mr. Vernon did not question her; he thought it wisest to let her use her own time. Marion

sat on the foot of the bed, but she kept silent—there was nothing for her to say.

"Mr. Vernon," said Mrs. Clyde as she raised herself and rested on her elbow, "I have carried a secret in my heart for years. I never intended telling it; but for the past few years it has tormented me so that I have been miserable. I thought I could carry it to the grave with me, but I could not. I committed a great wrong against you and Marion fifteen years ago. Listen, and I will tell you the whole story, and then crave your forgiveness."

"Go on with your story, Mrs. Clyde. You have our forgiveness already," said Mr. Vernon, and he looked at Marion.

She sat perfectly still, only her fingers working nervously. There was a frightened look on her face, for she had no idea what Mrs. Clyde was going to tell, and she did not know how it might affect her.

Mrs. Clyde commenced her story:

"Fifteen years ago I was a passenger on a ship coming across the Atlantic. Philip was a little lad then and he was with me. There was only one other lady passenger aboard beside myself, and she was confined to her cabin during the journey on account of sickness. She had a little girl with her about three years old. I learned about her being sick and went to see her. And as we were bound for the same town, we became friends. I nursed her, and Philip amused the little child. The lady grew worse, and a physician on board was called in to see her, but he said he could do her no good. When she real-

ized that death was near she called me to her and told me her story."

Here she stopped long enough to take a good breath, then continued:

"She said she had been abroad four years, and her husband had just died, so she was on her way back to her father's home. Her baby was born while abroad, and her father had never seen it. She gave me a bunch of keys and asked me to open a little trunk that she showed me. I did so, and she took out of it a large tin box that was securely locked. She did not open it, but informed me that it contained all her jewels and valuables, besides money. They were for her little girl, she told me. Then she asked if I would do her a great favor. I told her I would. She begged me to carry her child and her valuables to her father and give them into his own hands. I promised I would, but God knows how I have kept that promise. She died the next day and was buried at sea. I think the little child would have cried itself to death if it had not been for Philip. He nursed it, and was as tender with it as its own mother would have been. One day I decided to see the contents of the tin box, and when I opened it I was amazed. There were jewels of all descriptions, besides other valuables, and ten thousand dollars in money. God, help me! I was tempted, and I yielded. With all that money and what the jewels would bring, I would be a rich woman and could give my boy all that he deserved. As soon as we reached New York I sold all the valuables and jewels and came on home with the children, a rich woman."

Mr. Vernon interrupted her.

"What did you do with the child, Mrs. Clyde?"

"I kept her, not from any love I had for her, but because my crime had made a coward of me. I didn't dare bring the child here and give her to the grandfather without some explanation, at least I thought so then. I would to heaven I had given up the child, even if I did keep the money. But I was afraid, so I thought the nicest plan was to keep all, and say nothing. Now that you know my story, can you forgive? You surely know who the lady was that I robbed, and that the little child was Marion, your own granddaughter. Say that you forgive me so that I can die in peace."

"Mrs. Clyde, your crime is indeed great, and it is hard to believe that any woman could be guilty of such," Mr. Vernon said huskily, "but of course you have our forgiveness—we could scarcely deny any one that. You could have kept everything if you had only given me the child. To think that I lived long, weary years alone and unhappy when my precious daughter's child was so near me and I did not know it! O, it is so hard, so hard," and the tears rolled down his cheeks when he thought of what that child's life had been.

"O, spare me, spare me; for I have suffered for my sin," she cried, despairingly, "but God has forgiven me, and I have atoned the best I know how. You have the child now, and can be happy with her."

"Why was it, Mrs. Clyde, that you were so unkind to the child? I should have thought you

would have loved her to make up for all you had robbed her of. Surely she was lovable."

"I think I disliked her so because she was a constant reminder of my sin. Every time she spoke, or looked at me, I thought of what I had done. O, I was a wicked woman then, and did not realize the enormity of my sin—I do now. And it was thro' this child I wronged that I found God and received forgiveness." She fell back on her pillow as tho' exhausted.

Mr. Vernon turned his attention to Marion. Poor child! She sat as one stunned, bewildered. She had heard every word of the story, and she was dazed. She was awakened to reality by the grandfather speaking to her.

"Marion, my precious Sybil's child, come to your old grandfather," and he held out his arms to her.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and leaped in his arms, and then sobbed as though her heart would break.

He caressed her lovingly. "Don't cry, my pet. Your early childhood was unhappy, but you need worry no longer. You are my own darling child!"

"O, grandfather! Can it possibly be true?" sobbed Marion.

"Yes, it is all true, my child. I have guessed this for some time, but refrained from mentioning it to you for fear I might be wrong. The first time I laid my eyes on you, I felt a little tugging at my heart-strings, for you looked so much like my daughter Sybil."

"Tell me my name, grandfather," said Marion, anxiously.

"Marion Heath. Your father was John Heath, a most admirable man," was the answer.

She smiled up at him happily. "I am so glad everything is cleared, and there is no more mystery."

He patted her face lovingly, and then put her aside and turned again to Mrs. Clyde.

"Mrs. Clyde, does Philip know this story?"

"O, no, no! It will nearly kill him when he does know it. He is all that is noble and good, and he will despise me when he learns it all."

"Need he know it? Marion and I are willing to keep it a secret if you wish it. It can do no good to tell it, and it will hurt him terribly," said Mr. Vernon.

"Yes, I know it will—that is a part of my punishment. He will suffer, but he must know it. Tell him, but not until I am dead, for then I cannot see the reproach in his dear eyes. Tell him not to despise his mother, for she loved him so, ah, yes, loved him too well."

Marion stepped to her side and took her hand in sympathy. "Don't worry any more, dear Aunt Janet. Rest assured that Philip will never despise you, though he will be terribly grieved. I wish he could be spared the knowledge, but of course that is left with you. I forgive you with all my heart, and will always call you aunty to prove it, so please don't grieve any more, but try to get well for Philip's sake."

"O, Marion, angel child, I can never get well. I have suffered much lately, but that is almost

over now." Then her face brightened visibly. "I shall soon be in the eternal home. God has washed away my sin, and is holding out his hand, ready to clasp mine as soon as I touch the Golden Shore."

Then a shadow falls across her face, and she cried out, "But my boy, my darling boy, he will be left all alone. Don't let him grieve too much, child. Take care of him for me, for he always loved you." She gasped for want of breath. "Bring him to me, my boy—quick," and fell back on the pillows.

Mr. Vernon hurriedly left the room to fetch Philip, while Marion tried to force some stimulants down her throat. She swallowed a little and was soon revived somewhat. Philip and Mr. Vernon entered hastily, but quietly. Philip went to the other side of the bed and leaned over his mother.

"O, mama darling, you are not dying, are you? How can you leave me?" and he wept like a little child. "Who will love me when you are gone? Speak to me, mother; don't die until you have recognized your child," and he raised her hand, and touched her face to see if all life had gone, for she was so quiet, and looked at him with such a glassy stare.

Mr. Vernon brushed the tears from his own eyes, and Marion leaned against him crying pitifully.

Philip leaned down and put his mouth close to his mother's ear, and said pleadingly, "Mama, speak to me, to your Philip."

She looked up at him and smiled faintly, as

though her strength had all gone, then raised a wan hand and just touched his face, when it fell back on the pillow. He caught her hand in his and raised it again to his face and held it there, and kissed it fondly, over and over.

"You will always love me, my darling boy?" she said at last, very wearily.

"Yes, mother, always."

"Philip?" weakly, and her eyes closed slowly.

"What is it, mama, dear?"

"Marion—will—love you—when I am—gone."

A pallor overspread her face, and she breathed with difficulty.

"Yes, mama, darling," he sobbed.

The three sat and watched her, Marion and her grandfather on one side, and Philip on the other. At times, as they watched, they could scarcely denote any breathing. Then they noticed that her lips were moving, as though she wanted to say something. They leaned over her to catch what she was trying to say. She was saying in the faintest kind of whisper,

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me, thy rod and thy staff they comfort me."

After a few short breaths she laid perfectly still. Philip turned and looked at Mr. Vernon with misery in his eyes.

"Your mother is at rest, my boy," he said to him. "I wish I knew what to say to comfort you. But I know from experience that in a trial like this, words are of little use. But don't give way to your grief too much. We all have these

trials to bear. I have laid more than one loved one to rest, and each time I felt that I could never go through the same again. But God never gives us more than we can bear. He knows what each one of us is capable of standing." As he spoke he thought of all the sweet children he had laid to rest, and of his wife, and his voice was full of tears.

Philip dropped his face between his hands and sobbed as only a strong man can. Poor Marion! She could not see him grieve so without doing something to comfort him. She wiped the tears from her eyes and went around to where he was sitting. She sat down by him, and took his hands from his face, and laid his head on her breast. She wound one arm around his neck, and with the other hand she softly stroked his cheek, in a caressing way. She held him to her tenderly, but said nothing. That little soft white hand that moved back and forth on his face was all that was needed. It told him worlds, and soothed him more than any words could have done. Mr. Vernon looked at the two, then at Marion's face, and he understood it all. He silently withdrew, and left the two together with the dead. He sent the carriage for Mrs. Carter, as he knew she could be of use to them. After a little Marion wiped the tears from Philip's face with her own little handkerchief, pressed him to her again, then leaned her head and kissed his lips. She then took him by the hand and led him from the room, and on downstairs and into the library, then went in search of Mr. Vernon.

"Grandfather, please go to Philip; he is in the library," she said to him.

"Yes, I am going to him now," he said; "you can go on home as soon as Mrs. Carter arrives. Send back for me early to-morrow morning. I shall not leave Philip alone. I have sent for Mrs. Carter, but she will be back home before dark."

"But grandpapa, don't tell Philip that miserable story," pleaded Marion; "think how much more he will suffer when he learns it."

"I promised, so I will have to tell him, but will not do so until after the funeral. It is not through choice that I am going to tell him, my child. I hate it as much as you do. You are pale, and need rest. Go along home; there is the carriage at the door now."

She went home, and right to bed, hoping she could sleep, and thus get rid of her thoughts. She had never been in the presence of death before, and the events of the last hour had impressed her much, and completely unstrung her nerves. Mrs. Clyde's white still face kept before her eyes, and she felt utterly wretched. She washed her face in cold water, and then lay down. In a few minutes she was sleeping soundly.

Mrs. Clyde was buried the next day in the little cemetery on the side of the road leading to town, not very far from the cottage. There were only a few mourners, Mr. Vernon, Marion, Mrs. Carter, Philip, and a few other faithful friends. After the funeral Mr. Vernon sent Marion on home with Mrs. Carter, and he went to the cottage with Philip and stayed with him the rest of the day.

It is three days since Mrs. Clyde was laid to rest. Marion has not seen Philip since that day. She and Mr. Vernon are alone in the drawing room. He is sitting in a large arm-chair. She is standing by his side, resting against him, with one arm around his neck.

"Grandpapa, you don't know how good I feel when I realize I am your own grandchild. I was happy as your adopted child, but I am far happier now," and she bent down and rubbed her cheek against his.

"It is strange that you should have taken such a fancy to me, and insisted on taking me, wasn't it?"

"Yes, it seemed strange," said he, "but it was God's work. The very first time I saw you I wanted you, and I meant to go through fire to get you, if necessary."

"Grandpapa, why don't you go over and see Philip—my happiness is marred when I think of him all alone and——"

"That's right," exclaimed he, jumping up. "I shall go over now, right away, and while there I will tell him his mother's story and be done with it."

"O, not just yet," and she caught hold of his coat sleeve; "wait a little longer—just a few days longer."

"My pet, there is nothing to be gained by putting it off. Now is the best time, or as good as any other time. I will be back in time for dinner, and will bring him back with me if I can get him to come."

"Yes, do! Tell him I want to see him."

When left alone she grew restless. She pictured to herself the interview between Mr. Vernon and Philip. She could see plainly the agony on his face, and hear him groan in his wretchedness.

"How I wish I had given him the promise to be his wife," she cried, "but instead, I let my miserable pride rule me. O, God! don't let his pride rule him as mine ruled me! What will he think and say when he realizes that all these years he has unconciously robbed me? Oh, my darling, how you will suffer!" She walked the floor restlessly. "It is worse than cruel to tell him of his mother's sin—he need never to have known."

She walked to the window every now and then to see if her grandfather was coming. She was waiting his return anxiously.

Mr. Vernon found Philip at home, reclining on a sofa with his eyes closed, but not asleep. He arose, and greeted his friend, then relaxed into silence. Mr. Vernon did all the talking. At last he broached the subject that had worried him for days. "Philip, your mother confided a secret to Marion and me just before she died, and begged me to tell it to you after she was gone. I am sorry to say anything that will pain you, and I know what I am going to tell will cause a great deal of pain, but try to bear it patiently, and remember that your mother loved you blindly."

"Tell it to me, friend," said Philip, hopelessly; "nothing can hurt me very much now."

Mr. Vernon looked at him anxiously a few moments, then told him the whole story. During the recital Philip kept his face in his hand, his

eyes on the floor. After Mr. Vernon had finished, there was a dead silence for a minute, then Philip raised his head and looked at his friend. Mr. Vernon was startled by the haggard look on the face raised to his.

"Tell me, is it true," said Philip in a hollow voice, "that mother—my mother was a thief? Oh, my God!" and he fell face downward on the sofa. His whole form was shaken with his sobs —he groaned aloud in his misery.

"Philip, boy, don't take it so hard. It is all right with Marion and me. I have her now, so what happened in the past does not matter. We forgave your mother freely when she confessed all. Don't grieve so; you will make yourself sick," said Mr. Vernon, trying to quiet him. "Come, we want you at the Oaks. There is no need for you to stay here all alone, and Marion begged me to fetch you."

"No, no, I could never face her! I, who have robbed her for years, though I did it unconsciously, heaven knows. I have loved her all my life, but she refused to give me her love, and she was right," said he, bitterly, "for how could she love such as I?"

He looked at his friend. "Is there nothing I can do to atone—nothing?"

"Nothing, my boy. I have my child, so I am satisfied. If you wish to please us both, cheer up a little, and come home with me."

"I cannot—I cannot," firmly.

"Very well, but I know Marion will be disappointed. Will you let us see you or hear from you in the next few days?"

"Yes, yes," he spoke as though he were restless and would rather be left alone.

Mr. Vernon rose and put on his hat. "I shall leave you now, but shall expect to see or hear from you shortly," and he left the house.

Marion was sitting on the steps watching for her grandfather as he came up. Her heart sank within her when she saw that he was alone—she knew that all was not well with Philip.

"Where is he, grandfather; why did he not come?" she asked plaintively.

"My child, he is almost crazy," shaking his head sorrowfully, "and if I had known how hard it was going with him, I never would have promised to tell him; but thank heaven, it is over. It had preyed on my mind so. He loves you, my darling, and that makes it so much harder," caressing her hair lovingly. "It was a terrible blow to him. I tried to coax him to come home with me, but he would not hear to it."

"Is he all alone—is no one with him," asked Marion in distress.

"Yes, he is alone, and it is better so, child, until some of his grief has worn off. He promised to let us hear from him in a day or two. Marion, my dear, you don't look like yourself. You have been worrying entirely too much these past few days. You are not used to it, and it will soon break up your health. Come, let me take you to your room, and you must stay there until you feel better."

Two days have passed, and no word from Philip. Marion is greatly distressed about it, and has pleaded with Mr. Vernon to go over and see

if all is well with Philip, but he only answered her that Philip was better alone, and that they would be sure to receive some message in the next day or two. But that did not satisfy Marion—she knew that he was miserable and needed comfort. Of course she could not go to him, that was not to be thought of. The worry and excitement of the last week had told on her very much. She was scarcely able to be up. Mr. Vernon had suggested calling in a doctor, but Marion assured him that there was nothing seriously wrong with her—that Mrs. Carter could do all that was necessary, and she would soon be herself again. She was reclining languidly on the sofa the next day, her grandfather sitting by the window reading aloud to her. Presently the maid came in with a letter, handed it to Marion, then left the room.

"It is from Philip," said she excitedly, and she took it to the window to read it. She tore it open nervously and commenced reading it.

Mr. Vernon laid his book on his lap and watched her face as she read. He soon saw from her expression that there was bad news. As he watched, her face became whiter and whiter, her hands trembled, the missive slipped from her fingers, and she fell to the floor unconscious. Mr. Vernon tried to catch her before she fell, but was too late. He picked her up tenderly, laid her on the sofa, then went to the door and called for help. He went back to the sofa and knelt down by her.

"Marion, my precious child," chafing her hands, "you are wounded, and by the man you

love, too. Open your eyes, my pet, and look at your old grandfather," he said, pitifully.

Just then Mrs. Carter came in with restoratives, and they worked over her for an hour before she regained consciousness. She looked pleadingly into Mr. Vernon's face.

"What was it, my pet, that hurt you so? My poor, little wounded bird—tell me, sweet."

"The letter—read it," was all she said in reply.

He stooped and picked it up off the floor, and put it in his pocket. He would not read it while Mrs. Carter was in the room. After giving Marion some stimulant, and making her comfortable, she went back to her work, and as soon as she was gone Mr. Vernon opened the letter and read:

"DEAR MARION:—Would to God I could atone in some measure for the terrible wrong done you by my mother. Oh, if I had only known I would have been spared this misery of mind. It is almost more than I can bear to think of your unhappy childhood in comparison with mine. I had everything, and you had nothing—and it was yours all the time and I did not know it. It is agony to me to think that for years I robbed you of everything, unwittingly, though it was. Forgive me, that I ever aspired to your hand. I had never quite given you up, but that is all at an end now. Dear little girl! you thought you were not good enough to be my wife then—how about now? Ah, child, I am not fit to touch the hem of your dress—and yet, God knows I am innocent. But I must suffer for my mother's sin. I am going away, sweet Marion—away from every

familiar object and scene. I shall not throw my life away, for I could not do that after once knowing and loving you. I shall live to worship you, but at a distance. Your image I will always carry in my heart, and I will bless you with my last breath.

"The little cottage I leave as it is. Do with it as you like—it is yours, bought with your money. Don't let Mr. Vernon think me ungrateful. I shall never forget all his kindnesses, but I must go. I cannot remain here a day longer. I shall work as I have never worked before, and by that means I hope to lessen the pain that is tearing at my heart. Good-by, sweet Marion, good-by.

"PHILIP."

Mr. Vernon folded the letter and placed it in Marion's little desk. She lay on the sofa looking at him with such a pitiful expression on her face. He went up to her and took her in his arms.

"You love him, my pet?" he said soothingly.

"O, grandfather, so much, so much."

"Why did you refuse him, my child, when he told you of his love?"

"It was all my hateful pride. I was afraid that some day he might regret having married me," and she buried her face on his shoulder and sobbed.

"Poor little girl! You have both suffered, and will suffer more, I am afraid. You see, dear, if you had given him the promise to be his wife he would not have gone off in this manner. You would have had some claim on him, but as it is you have none. He thinks you do not love him, else he would not go away without seeing you."

"Is it too late," anxiously; "do you think he has gone yet?" she asked.

"Yes, I am sure he has gone. But something must be done right away—we must bring our boy back."

"Oh, do you think he will come back? You know he was always so determined, once he had made up his mind."

"We may not succeed at first. It may be hard to accomplish, but we must never give up. My part of the work will be to find out, if possible, where he has gone. Then it will be left to you to write and bring him back. Let him know that you love him, that he is essential to your happiness, and he will come, or else I am very much mistaken in the boy. Wipe the tears away now, and cheer up—all will be well yet. I shall go to town this afternoon and see what I can find out, and if that plan doesn't work we will advertise in all the papers."

Marion felt comforted, because she had faith in her grandfather, and knew when he set out to perform a task he did not do it by halves. He generally succeeded in everything he undertook.

Days, weeks, and months have passed. Mr. Vernon did everything he could think of, but no one could tell him anything about Philip, or where he had gone. He advertised in all the papers, urging him to come home, or to communicate with him; but he never received any answer. Still he did not give up. Marion gave up hope almost at the first. She remembered about his determination to go away before his mother's death, but she never told her grandfather that.

Poor child! She was in despair. Each day her cheeks grew less rosy, and her step more feeble. She was nothing like the bright Marion of old. Mr. Vernon noted the change and was alarmed at it. Yet he was helpless. It could do no good to call a doctor—her disease was of the mind and not the body. He longed to have Philip back, on Marion's account, and because he loved him himself. He had often wished that Philip and Marion would wed, so he could always have them both with him. However, he had never spoken of his wish to either of them. He had lived long enough and seen enough of life to know that it was best not to interfere in such matters.

Let us turn to Philip and see how he fares. As soon as he mailed the letter to Marion he made his way to the railway station and boarded the first outgoing train. He did not stop anywhere until he reached Arizona. Then he made his way to the mines, joined one of the camps, and went to work with the rough miners. He was not used to such rough companions, and their language often jarred on him, but he worked on, and had as little to do with them as possible. The miners in his camp were a tough set, and they knew that Philip was not one of them, though he worked along with them. They discussed their own lives freely, and expected Philip to do the same, but he refused to say one word about his past life. They often looked at him with admiration, rough though they were, for he was good to look at, with his sleeves rolled high above his elbows, and his wavy brown hair resting on his forehead. It was not long before he had won

the respect of every miner, not only in his camp, but in the others also. They soon looked up to him and followed his advice without questioning. After a few months he was removed to another camp, with more congenial companions, and in a little while he learned to enjoy the work. It was hard, but it kept him busy, and left him little time to think. He did not know what was going on in the outer world. He told no one where he had gone, and he took no papers. There was one day in the week that he spent in thought—that was Sunday. He would not work on that day, so there was nothing to do but think. He would leave his companions and take solitary walks in the little valley below. It was there that he thought of Marion, and all he had hoped she would be to him some day. Then his thoughts would turn to his mother, and the lonely grave on the side of the road, a neglected grave, unless Marion in her goodness placed a flower upon it now and then. Perhaps the grass had grown over it by this time, and covered it with its green mantle. He could never blame his mother for what she had done. He loved her too much to think of her in any way except in kindness. He pitied her from his heart, but he did not blame her. She had been tempted beyond her strength, and her love for him had made her yield to that temptation. All she had ever done in life was done for him, and for his good, or what she thought was for his good.

One year has gone by; still no word from Philip. Marion thinks of him as though he were dead. She has no idea of ever seeing him again

in this life. Her suffering for the last year has changed her from the bright, happy girl to a serious woman. Mr. Vernon has kept up the search faithfully, and still has hope of finding the wanderer. He has never believed in tne word fail. After all other efforts had failed, he employed two detectives, feeling sure they would accomplish what he had failed to do. Each secured a photograph of Philip to help them and then set out in different directions. But after a vain search for long weary months they gave it up. They never once thought of going way out in Arizona among the mines to hunt for the lost one. They of course thought he had hid himself in some large city. Perhaps if they had gone to the mines they would not have recognized the bronzed, sad faced man as the original of the photograph in their possession.

Marion was startled a few weeks later by her grandfather rushing into the house, and up to her room, exclaiming, "Rejoice, little girl, the lost is found at last," and he threw his hat up into the air like some boy and shouted "Hurrah! hurrah!" Then he said more soberly, "Now to bring him home; get your paper and pen at once, and don't waste one minute."

"How did you find out where he was, after so long a time," said Marion excitedly; "tell me quick."

"O, go ahead and write, and I will explain afterwards," said he.

"No, no, tell me first, so I can realize it. I am so afraid I will wake and find it all a dream."

"Bless your sweet soul, it's no dream this

time," rubbing his hands together gleefully. "You know Pat Sullivan, the old Irishman that used to make eyes at you? He saw Philip and spoke to him no longer than last week."

"Pat Sullivan! Why, I thought he was somewhere in Arizona," in surprise.

"He was, to be sure, but he isn't now. He has come home after coining a pile of money. I happened to meet him by chance, to-day, and he was telling me about his work out there, when he suddenly mentioned Philip's name. I jumped clear out of my seat, I got so excited. He said that Philip has been working out in the Arizona mines for the past year, so he must have gone straight there after leaving home. He could not remember which camp Philip was working in, but said as soon as he got home he would get the full address and bring it round to you, so there would be no possible reason for the letter to go wrong. He did not work in the same mines with Philip, and did not see very much of him. I tell you the truth, Marion; I believe old Pat could have given me the full address just then, only he wanted some good reason to come around and see your bonny face," and he laughed heartily.

"O, grandpapa, do hush," and her cheeks reddened; "the idea of him caring to see me—he is old enough to be my great-grandfather."

"O, no, my lady, he isn't near so old as I am. Anyhow, he is not too old to know a treasure when he sees one, or to admire it, either," he replied, with a twinkle in his eye.

"He can admire me as much as he likes so long

as he brings me that address. But I had better write my letter now."

"There is someone at the door now," as the bell peeled out loudly; "run along, and let him see your face to pay for his trouble," he said to her teasingly. She ran downstairs, two steps at a time, and opened the front door. There stood Pat, with his hat in his hand, and a broad smile on his face.

"The top of the morning to you, Miss Marion," he said politely.

"Good-morning, Pat. Have you brought the address?"

"Faith, and I have," and he put his hand in his pocket and took out a small piece of paper with some writing on it, and handed it to her with a bow.

"O, I am so much obliged to you for this. Will you come in and see grandfather?"

"Sure, and I would like to, but I haven't the time this morning, Miss Marion. I will say good day to you," and he tipped his hat to her and made his departure.

Marion ran back to her grandfather, and showed him the paper.

"Your friend did not stay very long," he said to her.

"No, he seemed to be in a great hurry, or perhaps he knew I was anxious for him to go," and she laughed a wicked little laugh.

Mr. Vernon rose and took her hand. "Come, now, give your old granddad a sweet kiss for finding your boy for you; and I will leave you to write your letter. I knew that we would find

him some day—that was why I never gave up. You lost hope too soon."

She wound her arms around his neck and kissed him.

"Of course, you are always right, and I should have felt as you did, but I could not. I had no idea of ever hearing from him or seeing him again. Now that we know where he is, do you feel sure that he will come when I write? What shall we do if he refuses?"

"He will not refuse, my child. But if he should, we would take the first train and go to him and bring him back. I dare say the two of us could manage him. But your letter will be sufficient. I will leave you now so you can write."

As soon as Marion was left alone she fell on her knees and thanked God that he had at last answered her prayer; then she wrote:

"Dearest, come home! I love you, I love you—need I say more? We both love, and we have suffered. But all the suffering and pain is past—only the love is left. I ask you to come to me, I need you—there is little joy in life without you. You will not refuse me when you know my happiness depends on your coming. What has happened in the past is no fault of yours or mine, so we will forget it and commence anew. Don't wait a day, an hour—but come now. I shall wait for you underneath the arch of honeysuckle.

"Your own,

"MARION."

This was what Philip read one day while surrounded by his fellow workmen. A letter was a rare thing in the camp, and that was the first one

they had ever known Philip to receive. They watched him with curiosity as he read it. They commenced nudging one another when they saw how his face lit up with pleasure.

"That must have come from his best girl," said one to another in a whisper.

"You bet!" said his companion; "it's a pity we poor devils haven't got a best girl to write us a letter that would make us look happy like that."

"I don't think I ever saw him look like that before; it was so seldom he smiled, and then it seemed to be forced," said the first speaker.

"I am sure he came here, driven from home by some sorrow, for he has never been one of us, though he has worked along with us for quite a while," said his companion.

"Well, boys," said Philip, folding the letter and putting it in his pocket, "I have a letter calling me home, so will leave here immediately. I have enjoyed my stay among you, and I shall not forget a one of you. I wish you all success, and as much happiness as I am looking forward to."

"Thank you, pard," said one; "I am sure we all hate to see you go."

"That we do!" chimed in the others.

Philip shook the hand of each man in parting, and left them to get ready for his long journey. Many a time afterwards the miners discussed Philip and his letter, and wondered what good news it contained.

Marion is happy. She has just received a few lines from Philip saying he will be with her that afternoon. O, what wonders happiness can work. The roses have returned to her cheeks,

and a song to her lips. She goes about the house no longer with lagging footsteps. The weary expression that had characterized her face for the past year has gone, and there is nothing but hope and happiness in every feature. Mr. Vernon noted the change in amazement. He never dreamed that his little girl had loved so deeply, that Philip's going and coming could make such a change in her life.

"I am afraid your old grandfather doesn't count for much in making you happy," said he, teasing her about the change wrought in her, one day; "and yet just look what that scamp Philip can do? He had the power to bring all these red roses back," pinching her cheek playfully; "and I could not, though I tired so hard to."

"Oh, grandpapa, you know how dearly I love you, and I don't think I could get along without you now, but"—and she blushed crimson and hid her face on his arm—"you—you know how it is."

"Yes, yes," patting her on the shoulder, "I understand—I was only teasing you. I know there is nothing like love's young dream."

Marion sat before her mirror and brushed out her long brown curls, the curls Philip had always admired so much. She brushed them back and caught them together with a pretty blue ribbon, then donned a dainty dress that resembled the skin in hue, and went out to the trysting place to wait for Philip. After sitting there for about a half hour, she heard a crunching of the leaves, and she knew that he had come. She rose, and just as he came up to her she leaped into his arms, without a word. He strained her to his

heart, and held her thus for some minutes, too full for words. Then he took her face between his hands and raised it so that he could see her eyes.

"Marion, my own darling," he said passionately, "tell me you love me, my sweet. I want to hear you say the words with your dear lips."

For answer, she nestled up closer to him. He held her fast.

"You are mine now, my priceless treasure! Look up, and speak to me, Marion," for she still kept her face on his shoulder.

She raised her head, and wound her arms tightly around his neck, and pressed her cheek to his.

"O, Philip, I am so happy—so happy. You won't ever leave me again, will you?"

"No, sweetheart," fondly; "never again. We are going to be happy now. You are going to be my little wife, and I the proudest man in the world."

He drew her to the seat and they sat down together. He took her hand and pressed it fondly, "And so you are sure that you love me, eh, girlie? When did you find it out?"

"I knew it all the time—years ago," and she turned her face away from him to hide her blushes, "when you used to pull my curls and tease me. I tried to make myself believe otherwise. I was too proud, and so I have suffered for it."

"I want my little wife right away," he said coaxingly; "you won't make me wait long, will you, dearest?"

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"I will come to you as soon as you like," she answered.

"I shall claim you in a month, for I know you want some time in which to get all your pretty things. Will a month be long enough for you to get ready in?"

"O, yes, plenty of time, but perhaps we had better see what grandpapa has to say, though I feel sure he will be willing for anything that we decide upon."

"I am not so sure about that," said he; "he may not care to give up his granddaughter so soon. I hope he won't make me wait too long."

"Come," said she, rising, "I know he is anxious to see you, so don't let us keep him waiting."

They went to the house together, and found Mr. Vernon in the drawing room waiting for them. He took both of Philip's hands in his, and shook them long and heartily.

"Welcome home, my dear boy! The sight of you does my poor old heart good."

"Thank you, dear friend," said Philip; "it is happiness beyond words for me to be back here again."

"Come here, Marion," said Mr. Vernon. He took her hand and placed it in Philip's. "Here, take her, boy; she is yours, and a treasure she is, too. I trust her with you as I would with myself. You have the power to make her life one long happy dream, and I believe you will do it," said he earnestly.

"I do not know how to thank you, sir, but I will try to prove to you that I am not unworthy of your trust. Can I claim her in a—a month,

sir," he said, as though he was afraid he was asking too much.

"Any time that you and Marion decide upon will suit me, but I have one request to make, and I hope you will please me by granting it."

"Just name it, sir. There is nothing I would refuse you, and I know Mairon feels as I do. We know you would never ask anything unreasonable, so just consider your request granted before asking it."

"Don't take Marion away from me altogether. Make your home with me. The house is large, and there's plenty of room for us all, even in years to come," for he was thinking of the little feet that would run up and down the big halls some day in the future. "I think I would pine away from loneliness, if I had to live all by myself. I want both of you with me, for I am getting old now, and you are all I have in this world. Am I asking too much?"

"No, indeed! Both Marion and I will like that plan. There is no reason why we should be separated." Then he turned to Marion, "What have you to say, sweetheart?"

"We will stay here always," she said. "I would rather live here than any place in the world. We can be so happy together, and grandpapa will have two children, instead of one, to torment his life out," and she smiled sweetly and happily at the old man.

"All right," said Mr. Vernon, in a satisfied tone; "I see a great deal of happiness in store for us all. We will expect you to stay with us as our guest, Philip, until the wedding, and then you

will stay on as my son," and his face showed how happy he was. "So make yourself at home; Mrs. Carter has fixed a room for you. I give the job of amusing you over to the little girl there," pointing his finger to Marion, "and I am sure I could not please her better, or you either. I will leave you now, for I know from experience that with lovers, two is company, and three a crowd," and he shook his finger at Marion teasingly, then left the two alone.

Philip put his arm around her and drew her to the sofa. "Sit down, darling." He sat by her with his arm still holding her, and he leaned over every now and then and pressed his lips to hers. He could scarcely realize his happiness, that he really held her in his arms, and kissed her at will. He had often dreamed of it, by day and by night, and now he was trying to realize it all, for it seemed too good to be true. They sat and talked for hours, until the last red glow from the fading sun threw its rays over the land. One little ray found its way through the curtain, fell on the floor at the lovers' feet, flickered for a minute, then was gone. Twilight had come; still they talked on. Finally Mr. Vernon came in with a light, and then Mrs. Carter entered and announced supper. During the talk between the lovers the subject of Mrs. Clyde's sin was avoided by both. They knew that if they expected any happiness that subject must be avoided. It could bring nothing but pain to both.

The wedding was a very quiet affair. Mr. Vernon wanted to have a swell one, but Marion and Philip preferred not to make a great show,

and so they had their way in the matter. They were married at the Oaks, with just a few of their friends present. Marion was beautiful in her simple but elegant white robe, with a wreath of orange blossoms as a crown for her golden head.

Philip was a bridegroom that any bride might well be proud of. Mr. Vernon gave the bride away, and he did so with a happy smile on his face, for he knew he was giving her into excellent hands. He realized that he did not have a great many more years to live, and he was glad to know that after he was gone his beloved grandchild would be in safe hands.

They spent their honeymoon at the Oaks, the place they loved best on earth. Philip had asked Marion where she would like to go, and she had told him that she preferred staying at home.

"You know," she had said to him, "our honeymoon will not be like all the others; ours will not last a week or so, but a lifetime, so we will spend it at the Oaks."

Philip was well pleased with her answer.

It is five years later. Let us take a peep into the drawing room at the Oaks. Seated in a large comfortable arm-chair we see Great-grandfather Vernon, white-haired now, with little one-year-old Sybil on his knee, dancing in baby delight. She is trying to catch hold of his long white beard, but he dodges her dainty little fat hands. Every once in a while she succeeds in catching hold of it, for a minute, and then she screams with delight.

Marion is sitting by the table with a picture

book on her lap, a beautiful curly-headed boy leans against her knee, listening intently to the story she is reading. The light falls on her face as she reads. She is the same sweet Marion of old, only she has grown more beautiful. Philip sits at a little distance, looking on at the lovely picture before him. In all his dreams he had never imagined such happiness as has come to him. He loves the two beautiful children, and never tires watching them and admiring them. But that little wife! She is the crown of all his happiness. She comes first in his heart, above all in the world. It is on her that his eyes rest most lovingly and tenderly. His whole life rests, as it were, in that little woman's hands.

Guy Strong has returned, an older and stronger man. He still loves Marion, but not in the same old way. He thinks of her and looks upon her as something sacred, and he is a better man for having loved her. He often spends pleasant evenings at the Oaks, and enjoys a romp with the children.

Mr. Vernon declares he feels ten years younger. Little Sybil is his chief delight, and she is never happier than when in his arms, pinching his nose, or pulling at his beard.

The Oaks is no longer the quiet place it used to be before Marion came to it. Little feet patter from one end of it to the other, and happy voices shout in delight at play. In that home love and happiness reign supreme.

THE END.

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